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What is the meaning of equal marriage in the Church of England?

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The material being presented for examination is my own work and has not been submitted for an award of this or another HEI except in minor particulars which are explicitly noted in the body of the thesis. Where research pertaining to the thesis was undertaken collaboratively, the nature and extent of my individual contribution has been made explicit.

What is the meaning of equal marriage in the Church of England?

Abstract

The Church of England's traditional theology of marriage between one man and one woman is protected in the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013 from reforms to civil law to include same-sex couples. Within the Church of England, same-sex couples who enter civil unions (of partnership or marriage) are not permitted to have a service in church to celebrate with prayer for God's blessing. Clergy in civil partnerships are not permitted by the Church of England to convert their union to civil marriage if they hold a bishop's licence to practice. This research questions the meaning of equal relationships, both marriage and same-sex unions, to test three of the benefits of marriage asserted by the Church to the UK Government: mutuality, fidelity, and the biological complementarity of the couple with the possibility of procreation (Church of England, 2012).

A methodology of practical theology, where my practice-based research leads to theory that reforms practice, fosters dialogue among voices of theology within the context of the Church of England. A postliberal interdisciplinary approach recognises plural meanings within my research field and adopts narrative methods for data generation, analysis, interpretation and presentation. Theologies of equal marriage and union, interpreted from narratives co-constructed with my participants, are brought into conversation with premodern liturgies for blessings of unions of Christian harmony and peace, seeking a fusion of horizons expressed through performed ritual.

This research argues that two of the Church's benefits of marriage, mutuality and fidelity, are embodied in all participants' marriages and civil partnerships, but challenges the Church's third benefit, because it is stated as derived from acknowledgement of an underlying biological complementarity of the couple. Changes in the legal and social contexts in England, academic research literature in the fields of gender and sexuality, and evidence from research participants' lived practices lead to reinterpretation of the third benefit as *responsible choices for parenting and the nurture of children in a pro/creative relationship.*

Implications for the Church of England are that emerging theologies in this research mandate policy changes, to lift the Church's prohibition of services in church after same-sex civil unions and to pilot new liturgies of blessing. For mixed-sex couples to marry each other in a liturgy of Christian equal marriage, this research offers two areas for light revision of the Church's contemporary liturgy to provide alternative options: gender-neutral language and rubrics, and nuanced language expressing loving intimacy rather than specific emphasis on sexual union. These changes will enable the Church of England to renew Christian marriage based on a recovered and reinterpreted theology of Christian unions of harmony and peace, so that couples can celebrate in church with prayer for God's blessing either through marriage or a service after their civil union.

Summary of Portfolio

Conversations with couples preparing for marriage in my Church of England parishes raised questions in my pastoral practice as a priest, leading to this research. Mixed-sex couples sought to express and celebrate their equal relationships in a church wedding ceremony and same-sex couples asked for a service with blessing after their civil partnerships, raising questions about meanings of equal marriage in Church. My pastoral concern for couples, some of whom felt excluded by the Church, initiated this practice-based research through the professional doctorate.

I surveyed literature on the power of Christian community storytelling because through practice I had experienced rituals with symbols, actions and words that transformed the people present. I focused on marriage both for the pastoral reasons above and because weddings involved people from the wider community, fulfilling a traditional role in English culture and society. My literature review prompted me to search for a theological approach beyond the adversarial groupings within the Church I had experienced in General Synod debates between traditionalists and liberals. My published article questioned whether equal marriage is an Anglican ideal, coinciding with reform of civil marriage law to include same-sex couples and the Church's response to reiterate its theology of marriage as between one man and one woman.

My research design adopted an inductive narrative methodology within practical theology, based on a postliberal approach that recognises the particular cultural context of the religion lived in the Church of England. I invited participants to be co-researchers seeking meanings of equal marriage within the Church. Stories of their own relationships and experience grounded the research in practice, for analysis with interpretation of emerging theologies of marriage and partnership. Evidence from this research signposts significant practices and theologies of equal marriage and partnership within the Church of England, interpreted in dialogue with premodern liturgies for unions of Christian harmony and peace.

Reflecting on my professional doctorate undertaken as a practitioner-researcher, I have recognised the timeless and powerful significance of community sacred rituals in Christian churches not only for couples seeking marriage or a blessing, but for their families and wider society. In the light of my portfolio and this research I argue that the Church of England can lift its prohibition of blessing of same-sex couples. I argue that the Church can welcome through liturgies of marriage and blessing all couples who seek to celebrate their loving, committed unions in Church.

Contents

What is the meaning of equal marriage in the Church of England?

Introduction

My research thesis argues that emerging theologies of equal marriage and partnership offer evidence to mandate reform of the Church of England's policy and liturgies, so that parish clergy can offer a Christian pastoral welcome to couples who seek either to marry in church under canon law, or to celebrate in church with a service of prayer for God's blessing after their civil union.

My professional practice as a parish priest in the Church of England ("the Church") raised questions and pastoral concerns about the meaning of equal marriage, leading to this research. After a decade in England of rapid social change when civil law was reformed by Parliament, firstly to introduce civil partnership (2004) followed by enacting equality in marriage for mixed- and same-sex couples (2013), the Church of England's canon law remained unchanged.

The Church had accepted Parliament's introduction of civil partnership for same-sex couples (2004) because it provided legal and economic benefits as a matter of justice for partners sharing a household (Church of England, 2012, p. 1). Church of England clergy in same-sex relationships were permitted to enter a civil partnership whilst holding a licence to minister, on condition they affirmed conformity to the Church's teaching, that sexual intercourse 'properly belongs within marriage exclusively' (Church of England, 1991, 2005). The Church of England's teaching on traditional marriage and recognition of civil partnership are, therefore, as two different relationships with distinctive meanings.

Mixed-sex couples have a long-standing right to marry in English parish churches, where clergy continue to receive enquiries from couples for church weddings, and they may enquire for a service with prayer for God's blessing after a civil marriage. Same-sex couples from within the Church of England including clergy entered into civil partnerships, in a town hall or secular licensed venue from 2005. Practising Christian couples desired to celebrate in their Church of England parish church, but, while the Church officially welcomed and encouraged mixed-sex couples to marry in church, or to have a service with prayer for God's blessing in church after their civil marriage, the Church of England permitted no provision for same-sex couples after their civil partnership.

When the UK Government reformed civil marriage to include same-sex couples, the Marriage Act (2013) enabled civil partners to become married spouses without a further

ceremony, recording their civil partnership date on the marriage certificate. The Church's House of Bishops swiftly issued guidelines (2014) to prohibit clergy in a same-sex relationship from contracting or converting their partnership to civil marriage, if they held a Bishop's licence to practise as a priest.

The Church of England's traditional theology for 'marriage in general – and not just the marriage of Christians' (Church of England, 2012, p. 2) defines marriage as between one man and one woman (Canon B30).[1] When Parliament reformed civil law to include same-sex couples (2013), English law on marriage diverged between civil and canon law codes, with differing underlying understandings of the nature of marriage and the marriage ceremonies performed and solemnised. The House of Bishops' guidelines to clergy (2014) reiterated the Church's traditional teaching on marriage – for mixed-sex couples only – and continued to prohibit parish clergy from offering services in church after same-sex civil unions, and from praying for God's blessing for the couple in private.

The divergence between civil and canon law on marriage resulted in two distinct routes to marry in England: either under civil law, for all couples in town halls or licensed secular premises; or under canon law, for mixed–sex couples in Church of England parish churches where they qualified. Mixed-sex couples could marry under canon law, or have a service of prayer with blessing in their parish church after civil marriage, but same-sex couples could not marry in church under canon law, and were prohibited from having service in church after a civil union.

My research into the meaning of equal marriage within the Church of England addresses questions caused by the divergence of canon and civil laws for marriage and legal partnership. In parish practice, the focus of changes in lived experience is the traditional ritual of marriage – a church wedding – and a service with prayers and a blessing in church after civil marriage, but only for mixed-sex couples.

This research was conducted with participants within the Church of England who were married or in civil partnerships. Some were clergy (in parish practice in non-metropolitan contexts) and others were lay people, all in mainstream parish church congregations. From eight dioceses, half the participants were located in the Northern Province of the Church of England and half, the Southern. I invited participants to become co-researchers into the

[1] Church of England. (n. d.). *Section B: Divine service and the administration of the sacraments.* https://www.churchofengland.org/more/policy-and-thinking/canons-church-england/section-b Canon B30. 'Of Holy Matrimony.' para. 1.

meaning of equal marriage within the Church, seeking within their own relationships a sense of equality.[2]

Each of the following chapters explores sources of four voices of theology (Cameron, Bhatti, Duce, Sweeney, & Watkins, 2010): formal (Chapter 1), through the academic process of this research project; operant (Chapter 2), expressed in lived practices in the English social and legal context of the early 21st century; espoused (Chapter 3), theologies voiced and performed by participants from their Christian beliefs; and normative (Chapter 4), the teaching and practices of the Church focused on liturgies of marriage and blessing in church. The sources of voices of theology interact in all four chapters in rich dialogue, to address my research question.

My academic research context within the field of practical theology (Miller-McLemore, 2012, Bennett, Graham, Pattison, & Walton, 2018) was the single Christian denomination of the Church of England, the national, established Church.[3] Adopting a postliberal, cultural-linguistic approach (Lindbeck, 1984) with narrative approaches to interpretation (Bold, 2012) I designed a methodology of practical theology[4] 'to ensure, encourage and enable faithful participation in the continuing gospel narrative' (Swinton & Mowat, 2006, p. 10). As a practitioner-researcher in the Church of England, I sought 'to research… the barriers to releasing the power of Christian narratives which are still held within the faith community and her sacred texts,' having 'recognised that a critical issue is power and its release or suppression in the churches, including the power of the researcher to free or suppress voices.'[5] As a priest in parish practice, I recognised that research in practical theology would both change myself as the practitioner and 'effect change from within the practitioners' own contexts' (Cameron, et al., 2010, p. 59). This intervention could, therefore, be 'at the forefront of new understandings of what it is or might be to be human' (Pattison, 2007, p. 279). Aligning myself with academic researchers 'as advocates and interpreters of the stories of struggle and survival from the grassroots,' (Graham, 2007)[6] I engaged with my research participants as the primary subject matter in the 'living human web,' with a 'communal contextual' paradigm that 'attends to the impact of social forces and proposes

[2] Appendix 1.
[3] (Church of England. (n. d.). *History of the Church of England*. Retrieved from: https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/church-england-glance/history-church-england
[4] Research Proposal. Portfolio.
[5] Literature Review. Portfolio, p. 49.
[6] Graham, E. (2007). Power, knowledge and authority in public theology. *International Journal of Public Theology, 1*, 42-62. p. 47.

changes in social policy as well as in individuals and congregations' (Miller-McLemore, cited by Hoeft, 2012, p. 413). Aware of the likelihood of social forces and the Church's prohibitions having an impact on some of my participants, those in same-sex relationships and those who were clergy offering pastoral care to same-sex couples, I designed my research to ensure confidentiality and a secure context.[7] The concept of 'four voices of theology' (Cameron, et al., 2010, p. 54) prompted my initial interpretation of how *operant* and *espoused* theologies in the Church of England both affirm and challenge its *normative* theology, as I sought through *formal* theological academic research to understand the gaps created by change and resistance to change. I argue that this research in the field of practical theology, 'a confessional science of the human spirit,' can 'embrace its capacity to change as well as to understand the world' (Pattison, 2007, pp. 283-286), by engaging in research-based practice that leads not only to revised theory and theology but to changes in performed practice (Graham & Llewellyn, 2018, p. 42).

In the first chapter, through ***formal voices of theology*** I lay the foundations for my research design, rationale, theoretical frameworks, methodology, methods and ethics. Detailed analysis of data with interpretation (Saldaña, 2013, Bryman, 2016) tease out complexities of lived experience in marriage and civil partnerships including parenting and the nurture of children, during a time of changing social realities and laws. I argue that formal processes of complexifying (Swinton & Mowat, 2006) are significant to enable practitioners and the wider Church of England to engage with theological questions arising from embodied practice by reflecting deeply together, rather than fragmenting into opposing adversarial groupings (Lindbeck, 1984). Recognising the significance of storytelling in a Christian cultural-linguistic postliberal approach (Graham, Walton, & Ward, 2005, 2007, Lindbeck, 1984) from Christian liturgical practice and from literature, I adopt narrative forms to interpret and present research findings (Crites, 1971, Walton, 2007, Bold, 2012, Ganzevoort, 2012, Slee, 2014).

In Chapter 2 I bring evidence of ***operant voices of theology,*** based on lived practice interpreted from my participants' narratives, into conversation with the Church of England's response to the UK Government's consultation prior to drafting the bill to include same-sex couples in civil marriage. The response submitted on behalf of the Church stated an understanding of 'the intrinsic nature of marriage,' with benefits to society promoting mutuality and fidelity, 'but also by acknowledging an underlying biological complementarity

[7] Ethics Approval. Portfolio.

which, for many, includes the possibility of procreation' (Church of England, 2012, p. 1). In this research I test whether these three benefits (asserted in the official response summary) resonate with my participants within the Church of England, because the third included 'acknowledging an underlying biological complementarity.' In Chapter 2, I argue that participants' operant theologies of equal relationships resonate with two of the benefits of marriage, mutuality and fidelity, and propose that this provides strong evidence of a convergence of lived practice for *both* marriage (mixed-sex) *and* civil partnership (same-sex) within the Church. Next, I question the Church's assertion of a further benefit of marriage, the biological complementarity of the couple with the possibility of procreation, in dialogue with evidence from research literature on gender and sexuality and from reports of social and legal changes in England, including contraception and assisted conception. Arguing from research literature, from social changes in practice and enacted in English law, and from operant theologies interpreted from all my research participants that having children should be optional in marriage, I propose that the Church of England reforms its third benefit of marriage that rests on an assumption of the biological complementarity of the couple, to recognise the wider social reality of *responsible choices for parenting and the nurture of children.*

In Chapter 3, I weave two distinct patterns of ***espoused voices of theology*** from threads of participants' beliefs about how they live in their marriage or partnership, including parenting, using representative constructions in narrative form (Bold, 2012). Firstly: *theologies of equal marriage in Church for mixed-sex couples only, with reform to provide services of prayer and blessing in church for the pastoral care of same-sex couples in civil unions*. Secondly: *theologies of equal marriage and partnership for all couples inclusive of their gender and sexuality, with marriage or services of prayer and blessing after civil unions, in Church.* I argue that these two distinct patterns in my research participants' operant and espoused theologies of marriage and civil partnership overlap by agreeing in two areas: that *all of their relationships are founded on mutuality and fidelity;* and *all have responsible choices for parenting and the nurture of children.* These two areas of agreement among participants lead to an overarching theme from this research on the meaning of equal marriage within the Church of England: a pastoral priority in practice to *recognise loving relationships in church*, *founded on mutuality and fidelity* where couples *have responsible choices for parenting and the nurture of children.*

In Chapter 4 I bring the patterns woven from dialogue among my sources of voices of theology into conversation with the Church's ***normative voices of theology*** performed in

liturgies, expressed in rituals with symbols. *Formal* research gathers *operant* convergence of experience and practice among participants, whose relationships are founded, I argue, on *espoused* theologies of mutuality and fidelity with responsible choices for parenting and the nurture of children, into dialogue with *normative* church liturgies of marriage and of blessing, both contemporary (Church of England, 2000) and premodern (Boswell, 1995). I propose that the contemporary convergence of equal relationships (in marriage and in civil partnership interpreted in Chapters 2 and 3) resonates with liturgical resources recovered from premodern blessings of two men, because these rituals expressed an equal relationship between two people of the same sex, gender and status. I interpret that a contemporary convergence on mutuality and fidelity among participants resonates less with some aspects of premodern marriage, where the social and legal status of the groom and bride differed because of their sexes and unequal gender roles.

I bring into the dialogue the changing 21st century social context with opportunities to equalize couples' relationships in practice, including assisted conception and contraception. I argue that these contemporary shifts in social reality, of convergence and divergence from premodern meanings of marriage and partnership, can stimulate the Church of England to renew vibrant Christian theologies of marriage and of partnership with liturgies to celebrate both forms of relationship in church. Based on this research, I propose three reforms in the Church of England's normative theology and liturgies. These reforms contribute to the Church's debate on relationships and parenting, through renewing practice and offering rich theologies of equal marriage and partnership founded on mutuality and fidelity, with responsible choices for parenting and the nurture of children.

I conclude that, woven together, the four sources of voices of theology interpreted in this research offer patterns of *emerging espoused Christian theologies of equal marriage and of civil partnership with responsible choices for parenting and the nurture of children* that have inspiring, creative potential as evidence for revised, alternative liturgies to pilot for equal marriage (mixed-sex) and for prayer with blessing after civil unions. Through a robust research process of practical theology, this tapestry of four interactive sources of voices, each with rich polyphonies, harmonies, pauses and discords, contributes to the contemporary debate in the Church of England. My thesis argues for a pastoral, missional priority for practitioners within the Church of England: to minister a Christian loving welcome including marriage or prayers for God's blessing in church, recognising *loving relationships founded on mutuality and fidelity* where couples *have responsible choices for parenting and the nurture of children,* in what I will term *a pro/creative relationship.*

Chapter 1

Formal voices of theology

Introduction

Formal voices of theology from the academy and literature prepare the ground for dialogue in the following chapters, to answer my research question on meanings of equal marriage in the Church of England. This chapter sets out what the research entailed, why I embarked on the seven-year project and how I undertook the research. In this chapter I envisage my formal research as 'a conceptual loom' where I have chosen frameworks with multiple strands from formal voices of theology as the context for my research question, design and execution. Formal voices provide my theoretical frameworks (the architecture of the loom) with strands from the academy and literature to weave into patterns (the fabric) that incorporate voices from operant, espoused and normative theologies in the Church of England in Chapters 2, 3 and 4.

I begin by locating myself as a practitioner-researcher within the Church of England, developing a voice from grassroots practice through this formal academic research. Next, I address the national context of marriage law in England to track the divergence of civil law from canon law from 2013. I analyse changes in law during the decade from 2004–2014, to examine how civil partnerships were introduced under civil law, followed by the Church of England's reform of marriage under canon law and, shortly afterwards, Parliament's reform of civil law for marriage to include same-sex couples. These changes in law had repercussions in the Church of England: for the Church leadership, for clergy, for couples approaching the Church of England for marriage or a blessing in church after civil union, for their families and wider communities. This decade of rapid change, I argue, created a challenging context in the Church of England, both for same-sex couples within the Church who entered civil unions and for clergy in parish practice who sought to offer an inclusive pastoral welcome to all couples. Three areas of change led to this research project into the meaning of equal marriage in the Church of England: the legal and social contexts for marriage in England; pastoral issues arising from professional practice in the Church of England; and the lived experience of couples seeking marriage or a blessing in church.

After setting the local and national contexts, this chapter presents the academic context for my research design in the field of practical theology to address my question: three theoretical frameworks and associated literature; and research methodology and methods.

The local context: a co-constructed, representative subaltern voice

As a practitioner-researcher my subaltern voice (Ganzevoort, 2012, p. 214) speaks from rooted parish practice in the Church of England. A subaltern voice can express unheard, muted and confused voices by hearing and interpreting meanings from lives and experiences shared at the grassroots of practice, often in confidence. Subaltern voices can, however, be ignored or suppressed because they come from a position without power. Clergy may speak through the Church of England's levels of synodical government, deanery, diocese and province, and through academic research. A literature review (Kirby, et al., 2017) published since my fieldwork in 2014-16 recommended that 'research must give voice to, and assist to better understand, the perspectives' of clergy who engage with 'current social mores against most religious mores' (2017, p. 914). Their identification of 'a gap in knowledge regarding current perspectives of individual clergy who support same-sex marriage' places this project in the forefront of qualitative, inductive evidence because three-quarters of my participants were ordained priests in the Church of England.[8] In this research I have woven a co-constructed, representative subaltern voice to speak for reform in the Church of England's debate on marriage and partnerships, interpreted from my participants' individual subaltern voices through co-constructed narratives.

The national context: civil and canon law in England for marriage

Canon law in England[9] for marriage had been reformed over centuries to provide a framework for the couple and their legitimate children in a stable social context. The Church of England took over the regulation of canon law in England from the Western Latin Church after the separation from Rome in 1534. Keeping a register in parish churches for baptism, marriage and funerals was required from autumn 1538 (MacCulloch, 2018).[10] Three hundred years later, in 1836, Parliament enacted civil law to introduce non-religious marriage. Thereafter, the Church of England and Parliament regulated respectively church

[8] My research question explores equal marriage including, but not limited to, attitudes to same-sex marriage. 'Support' by clergy in this research varies in emerging theologies of marriage and partnership. See Chapters 2 and 3..
[9] The established national Church only in England, limiting this research to one nation.
[10] MacCulloch, D. (2018). *Thomas Cromwell, a life.* London, UK: Allen Lane. (pp. 288, 465).

and civil marriage.[11] Until the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act was enacted in 2013 by Parliament to reform civil marriage law, canon and civil law codes both referred to marriage as between mixed-sex couples. The divergence of civil law from canon law for marriage is, therefore, an historic change with major implications for practice.

From 1549 all marriages were conducted by Church of England clergy under canon law. Abuses, such as secret marriages of underage children without parents' consent or bigamous marriages, led to the Marriage Act 1753 after which weddings were held in public, almost always in Church of England churches,[12] and recorded in church marriage registers. The Marriage Act 1836 permitted non-religious marriages in new civil premises, with civil registration from July 1837. Reforms in the 20th century raised the minimum age of marriage to 16 for both bride and groom in 1929 (formerly 12 for the girl, 14 for the boy, with parental consent until 'full age' of 21) and later lowered the age without parental consent to the current 18 years. These changes to marriage law applied to both civil and church weddings.

The Parliamentary process to reform civil law is initiated by a department of the UK Government holding a public consultation on an area being considered.[13] Next, the government tables a Bill for debate and amendment in Parliament through a lengthy process that includes the stages of readings, scrutiny from committees in both the House of Commons and the House of Lords, reporting and finally voting. After a Bill (with any amendments) is passed by Parliament the monarch grants royal assent, at which point the Bill enters the Statute Book as an Act of Parliament.[14]

At the turn of the millennium (2000), there was no legislation in place to accord legal rights or protection for same-sex couples in long-term committed relationships. Among mixed-sex couples marriage rates had fallen during the 20th century as cohabitation with family life became socially accepted, lowering stigma of illegitimacy but without the legal protection accorded by marriage. Marriage in religious premises had declined over the century so that by 2015, less than one in five weddings were solemnised in the Church of England.[15] Both Parliament and the Church of England's General Synod addressed the need for reform in

[11] Civil law regulated marriage in other religious premises: 1753, 1836.
[12] Jewish and Quaker marriages were exempt. ((n. d.). *The law of marriage.* Retrieved from https://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/private-lives/relationships/overview/lawofmarriage-/)
[13] A private Member of Parliament may table a Bill for debate.
[14] Parliament. (n. d.). *How laws are made.* Retrieved from https://www.parliament.uk/education/about-your-parliament/how-laws-are-made/
[15] See p. 46 and footnote 113.

marriage in England early in the first decade of the new millennium, with the first step from Parliament to provide protection for same-sex couples in long-term relationships.

Civil partnership

Parliament consulted on a new form of legal relationship for same-sex couples (2003)[16] and enacted legislation to introduce civil partnership (2004)[17] 'with rights and responsibilities identical to civil marriage.'[18] By tradition, law and long-established practice the institution of marriage under both civil law and canon law was assumed to be only for mixed-sex couples. Civil partnership was introduced as a distinct legal contract under civil law for two people of the same sex. Different in its contracting from marriage,[19] a couple enter a civil partnership by signing a form with two witnesses before a civil registrar, having made a legal declaration that each of the couple was free to contract the partnership. In practice, while some couples formalized civil partnership in a short, simple interaction with two witnesses and a registrar in a town hall register office, other couples chose to include secular readings, promises to each other and the exchange of rings during their ceremony in a licensed premise such as a hotel, with a celebration in a similar style to a wedding.

Church marriage reform

In parallel with Parliament (for civil law), the General Synod of the Church of England, the national Established Church, has a similar lengthy legal process to reform canon law. Measures[20] passed by General Synod proceed to Parliament for ratification, guided by the Second Church Estates Commissioner, before royal assent (for England only).[21]

On a separate path from Parliament's consideration of legislation for same-sex couples, early in the millennium the General Synod of the Church of England consulted on reform of

[16] Department of Trade and Industry, Women & Equality Unit. (2003). *Civil partnership: A framework for the legal recognition of same-sex couples.* Retrieved from http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+/www.womenandequalityunit.gov.uk/research/civ_par_con.pdf
[17] Government. (2004). *Civil Partnership Act 2004.* Retrieved from http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/33/contents
[18] Parliament. (n. d.). *The law of marriage.* Retrieved from https://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/private-lives/relationships/overview/lawofmarriage-/
[19] Haringey Council, London. (n. d.). *Ceremony scripts and words.* Retrieved from https://www.haringey.gov.uk/births-death-and-marriages/marriages-and-civil-partnerships/personalising-your-ceremony/ceremony-scripts-and-words#words
[20] 'Measures' by General Synod enact canon law, in parallel with 'Acts' of Parliament for civil law.
[21] The Church of England. (n. d.). *The work of the General Synod*. Retrieved from https://www.churchofengland.org/more/policy-and-thinking/work-general-synod;
The Church of England. (n. d.). *The Church in parliament.* Retrieved from https://www.churchofengland.org/more/policy-and-thinking/church-parliament

canon law for marriage, to revitalise church marriage by enabling couples (mixed-sex) to marry in parish churches across the land. The Marriage Measure (2008) introduced legal 'qualifying connections'[22] for couples to marry at churches where their families had lived, worshipped, married, or one of the couple had received baptism or confirmation. The Archbishops' Council commissioned The Weddings Project (2007) to research marriage in church, increase church weddings and resource parishes and clergy to welcome couples. A bulletin (2010), book (2012), national website with information, and printed resources for Church of England weddings followed,[23] linked to a general website where couples found their parish church by entering a postcode.[24] The project bulletin (2010) reported that 'from this research base the Project has developed a narrative on the place of church weddings in England today… to respond to the realities of England as it is.'[25] However, in 2012 the Church was taken by surprise when, only seven years after the first civil partnerships were contracted, Parliament consulted on the reform of civil marriage for same-sex couples. The 'realities of England as it is' were not only about marriage for mixed-sex couples, but about the developing social consensus in England that there was a need for an equitable legal civil institution for same-sex couples, which civil partnership partly fulfilled.

Civil marriage reform

The United Kingdom Government consulted on opening civil marriage in England and Wales to same-sex couples (Government, 2012a) in recognition of the rapid social acceptance of same-sex couples into public life through legal civil partnership from 2004. In the summary 81% of civil-partnered respondents expressed a desire to convert their partnership to marriage (Government, 2012b). Parliament reformed civil marriage[26] so that from March 2014 under English civil law, couples could marry regardless of their gender and sexuality (Government, 2013). The option of civil partnership continued for same-sex couples: the

[22] Prior to 2008, couples could marry after Banns in the parish church only where one or both resided or were on the church's Electoral Roll (through attendance). They could also apply for a Common Licence or, in particular circumstances, a Special Licence. (The Faculty Office. (n. d.). *Legal Entitlements to marry in a church: Residence, Church electoral roll membership and 'qualifying connections.'* Retrieved from www.facultyoffice.org.uk/special-licences/general-information-about-marriage-law/legal-entitlements-to-marry-in-a-churchresidencechurch-electoral-roll-membership-and-qualifying-connections/)

[23] Church Support Hub. (n. d.). *Weddings.* Retrieved from https://churchsupporthub.org/weddings/

[24] Church of England. (n. d.). *A church near you.* Retrieved from https://www.achurchnearyou.com/

[25] Church of England. (July 2010). *Resourcing mission bulletin. The weddings project.* Bayes, P. para 5. Retrieved from http://www.churchgrowthrd.org.uk/UserFiles/File/Resourcing_Mission_Bulletin/July_2010/Weddings_Project_July_2010.pdf

[26] Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013.

government's next review showed that a majority of respondents were against change to civil partnership (Government, 2014, p. 11, para. 2.12).[27] However, a mixed-sex cohabiting couple (and supporters)[28] campaigned for civil partnership to be open to all couples to obtain legal protection as an alternative to marriage, with a successful appeal in the Supreme Court (2018)[29] to require the Government to create parity.[30] To exempt the Church of England from changes made to civil law, the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013 included a 'quadruple lock'[31] for the Church to retain its traditional view, that marriage is between one man and one woman,[32] without the threat of legal challenge for discrimination.

Divergence in English law on marriage

In the decade from 2004 to 2014, civil law reform diverged from traditional understandings and practices of marriage in England by including same-sex couples and, therefore, diverged from canon law which remained for mixed-sex couples only. The Church of England had warned the UK Government:

> To change the nature of marriage for everyone will be divisive and deliver no obvious legal gains given the rights already conferred by civil partnerships. We also believe that imposing for essentially ideological reasons a new meaning on a term as familiar and fundamental as marriage would be deeply unwise (Church of England, 2012).

I argue in this research that within the Church of England new meanings of marriage are already lived in practice (operant theologies) with espoused theologies that embrace same-

[27] 75% of respondents were against opening civil partnerships to mixed-sex couples.
[28] Equal Civil Partnerships campaign. Retrieved from http://equalcivilpartnerships.org.uk/
[29] Bowcott, O. (2018, June 27). Ban on heterosexual civil partnerships in UK ruled discriminatory. *The Guardian.* Retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2018/jun/27/uk-ban-on-heterosexual-civil-partnerships-ruled-discriminatory
The format of Marriage Registers (for civil and canon law marriage) has remain unchanged since 1837 so that only the names of the couple's fathers are recorded with their 'rank or profession.'
[30] Legislation came into effect on 26th May 2019 to enable mixed-sex couples to become civil partners and to record mothers' names on marriage registers and certificates. UK Parliament website. (2019, March 29) *Civil partnerships, marriages and deaths (registration etc.) bill signed into law.* Retrieved from https://www.parliament.uk/business/news/2019/march/royal-assent-civil-partnerships-marriages-and-deaths-registration-etc-bill-signed-into-law/
[31] In the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013. (Department for Culture, Media & Sport, 2014b, Footnote p. 8.)
Effect on canon law: that Canon B30 remains the law of the land. (House of Bishops, 2014, Appendix, para. 11, footnote 8.)
[32] 'The Christian understanding and doctrine of marriage as a lifelong union between one man and one woman remains unchanged.' (House of Bishops, 2014).

sex couples in committed unions. These are not 'essentially ideological reasons' but, I argue, theologies emerging from lived 'practices of faithful Christian people [who are] themselves bearers of theology' (Cameron, et al., p. 51) within the Church, including clergy.[33]

The Church's official response continued that in England marriage had hitherto been the same institution with two routes, civil and church weddings:

> The consultation paper wrongly implies that there are two categories of marriage, 'civil' and 'religious'. This is to mistake the wedding ceremony for the institution of marriage. The assertion that 'religious marriage' will be unaffected by the proposals is therefore untrue, since fundamentally changing the state's understanding of marriage means that the nature of marriages solemnised in churches and other places of worship would also be changed (Church of England, 2012).

The Church of England recognised a fundamental change was being proposed and realised it would impact on the Church's practice. The Government's consultation summary acknowledged the potential divergence of civil law on marriage from canon law but argued that Parliament had legislated for differences in understanding and law earlier:

> Parliament is sovereign and can enact to take account of potential conflicts with the Canon law. In the case of marriage, the legislature has, in the past, sought to avoid conflict with the Canon law position by the use of exemption and conscience clauses so that the Church might take a position in conscience that is consistent with its teaching on the nature of marriage. So, for example, although legislation allows that people who are divorced to marry again, the Church and individual ministers, through convocations of the clergy, have been relieved of the obligation to marry such people (Government, 2012b, p. 17, para. 4.22).

The Government proceeded with reform to civil law and the House of Commons voted in favour by 400 to 175, a majority of 225, in February 2013.[34] The Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act received royal assent in July (2013) with the first same-sex civil marriages contracted in late March 2014. The Act enabled the Church of England to retain its traditional teaching and liturgies (for mixed-sex couples) while civil reforms welcomed a

[33] My research participants as 'competent speakers of a religious language' and 'those who have effectively interiorized a religion' (Lindbeck), see below: pp. 45, 53.
[34] British Broadcasting Corporation. (2013, February 5). *Gay marriage: MPs back bill despite Conservative backbench opposition.* Retrieved from https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-21346220

growing diversity of couples to marry in secular venues, regardless of their gender and sexuality. Civil law reform reflected and enabled social change towards inclusion in England while the established Church stood firmly still.

Impact on the Church of England as a result of reforms in civil law

Couples in civil partnerships within the Church

During this decade of rapid change in civil law, from December 2005 onwards some licensed clergy and lay people in the Church of England who were in long-term, committed relationships with a partner of the same sex took the new opportunity to legalise their partnerships under civil law. These civil partnerships were contracted before a civil registrar in a town hall or secular licensed premise. The couple could choose to become civil partners with just their two witnesses and the registrar present, or to arrange a full celebration with families and guests in the pattern of a wedding. As with all civil ceremonies, no religious content or music was permitted.[35] The proscription of religious content was echoed in guidelines for Church of England clergy.[36] Civil-partnered couples, including licensed clergy, could not sing hymns, include scriptural readings or involve a minister of religion in their ceremony (nor could couples entering civil marriage).

Civil partnerships were accepted by the Church of England because legal rights and protections in parallel with marriage were provided for long-term partners.[37] Licensed clergy who took this step were required to affirm to their bishop that their lives conformed to the Church's teaching, that sexual intimacy belongs only within marriage.[38] Accordingly,

[35] Referring to Annex C: '11. (1) Any proceedings conducted on approved premises shall not be religious in nature. (2) In particular, the proceedings shall not— (a) include extracts from an authorised religious marriage service or from sacred religious texts; (b) be led by a minister of religion or other religious leader; (c) involve a religious ritual or series of rituals; (d) include hymns or other religious chants; or, (e) include any form of worship.' (HM Passport Office. (2015). *The registrar general's guidance for the approval of premises as venues for civil marriages and civil partnerships.* Retrieved from https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/440072/ApprovedPremisesGuideIssue5.pdf)

[36] Clergy are advised not to attend civil premises to pray a blessing. (*Marriage in the Church of England.* (n. d.). para 11.2. Retrieved from http://www.oxford.anglican.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/marriage_in_the_church_of_england.pdf)

[37] 'We welcome that fact that previous legal and material inequities between heterosexual and same-sex partnerships have now been satisfactorily addressed' (Church of England, 2012, p. 1).

[38] 'Sexual intercourse, as an expression of faithful intimacy, properly belongs within marriage exclusively.' (Church of England, (2005, para. 4).

the Church of England required clergy in civil partnerships to affirm that their relationship was celibate and would remain so while the priest(s) held a licence to practice.

Biological complementarity

The Church's response to the Government consultation on civil marriage reform explained the traditional doctrine of marriage for mixed-sex couples, arguing for

> the intrinsic nature of marriage as the union of a man and a woman, as enshrined in human institutions throughout history. Marriage benefits society in many ways, not only by promoting mutuality and fidelity, but also by acknowledging an underlying biological complementarity which, for many, includes the possibility of procreation (Church of England, 2012).

The Church's response described marriage as having an 'intrinsic nature' with an 'underlying biological complementarity' with the possibility of procreation[39] arguing that in the Church's theology, same-sex couples *cannot* be married. 'The intrinsic nature of marriage' was asserted as between a couple defined by their different, 'opposite' natal sex and gender. This apparently binary and gender essentialist approach is critiqued from academic research later in this chapter, and in the dialogue following throughout this research.

The Church of England's response (2012) to the Government's consultations and the new legislation opposed any change and held firmly to traditional marriage, citing in particular three benefits: of mutuality, fidelity and the biological complementarity of the couple with the possibility of procreation. However, in the document from the House of Bishops (published as civil marriage ceremonies for same-sex couples were about to commence), the appendix restated Canon B30[40] on marriage, the Church's doctrine in law:

> The Church of England affirms, according to our Lord's teaching, that marriage is in its nature a union permanent and lifelong, for better for worse, till death them do part, of one man with one woman, to the exclusion of all others on either side, for the procreation and nurture of children,[41] for the hallowing and right direction of the

[39] 'Marriage affords many benefits to society, which include mutuality, fidelity and biological complementarity with the possibility of procreation.' (Church of England, 2012, p. 3, para. 6.)
[40] The 1603 Code of Canon Law for England was replaced in 1964 and 1969 and has been reformed regularly since by General Synod. Canon B30 remains unamended. (2016, June 30). *Table of Promulgation of Canons.* Retrieved from https://www.churchofengland.org/more/policy-and-thinking/canons-church-england/table-of-promulgation-of-canons#
[41] First 'cause of marriage' in the Book of Common Prayer (Church of England, 1662).

> natural instincts and affections,[42] and for the mutual society, help and comfort which the one ought to have of the other, both in prosperity and adversity[43] (House of Bishops, 2014, Appendix, para. 1).

The same publication from the House of Bishops began with a letter from the Archbishops reiterating 'the proposition that same sex relationships can embody crucial social virtues is not in dispute. Same sex relationships often embody genuine mutuality and fidelity' (House of Bishops, 2014). The normative theology of the Church of England defined by canon law (Canon B30) and restated by the House of Bishops (2014) was, I argue, reinterpreted by this recognition, that two of the three 'benefits,' 'virtues,' or 'causes' of marriage can be embodied by mixed- *and* same-sex couples.

The Church's argument for mixed-sex marriage therefore rested on the third 'benefit' in the Church's submission to the government (2012). However, Canon B30 on marriage in the Church of England (above) does not refer to the biological, gendered complementarity argued in the Church's response (2012):

> the uniqueness of marriage – and a further aspect of its virtuous nature – is that it embodies the underlying, objective, distinctiveness of men and women. This distinctiveness and complementarity are seen most explicitly in the biological union of man and woman which potentially brings to the relationship the fruitfulness of procreation (Church of England, 2012, p. 3, para. 10).

This language of complementarity had emerged earlier in the same year in a paper by the Archbishop of York (May 2012), posted online following correspondence generated by an interview given in Jamaica (January 2012).[44] Dr Sentamu, a former practising lawyer and judge,[45] clarified his theology on the possibility of civil marriage for same-sex couples:

> However the question for me is one of **justice**, and not **equality**. Justice is the primary category. It does not mean not treating everyone the same way but giving everyone what he or she needs or deserves: education to the young, home-care to

[42] Second cause (1662), rephrased here in contemporary language and referred to as 'fidelity' (Church of England, 2012, 2014) with a meaning of chaste monogamy.
[43] Third cause (1662), referred to as 'mutuality' (2012, 2014).
[44] Beckford, M. (2012, Jan 27). Don't legalise gay marriage, Archbishop of York Dr John Sentamu warns David Cameron. *The Daily Telegraph*. Retrieved from https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/religion/9045796/Dont-legalise-gay-marriage-Archbishop-of-York-Dr-John-Sentamu-warns-David-Cameron.html
[45] (n. d.). *John Sentamu's biography*. Retrieved from: https://www.archbishopofyork.org/john-sentamu/john-sentamus-biography

> the old, opportunity to the enterprising, protection to the threatened. **Equality follows justice**, and secures its consistent administration: not just some young people but all, not just some threatened people but all. A clear picture of the just order is what makes equality objective. Without it equality-claims are liable to be subjective and contradictory.
>
> If it was a question of justice, what injustice would result from not turning Civil Partners into married couples? I submit, ***No injustice***.
>
> The virtue of the Civil Partnerships scheme lay in the attempt to treat the needs of gay and lesbian couples as what they are, not to bundle them into some other category. *Marriage is built around complementarity of the sexes*, and therefore the Institution of Marriage is a support for stable families and societies.[46] (Emphasis in bold original, in italics added.)

Theories of a biological or gender complementarity of the sexes (and associated gendered roles) have been challenged by academic research, by changes in social expectations, by reforms of civil law and by practice in marriages, including those of research participants. Social changes in parenting outside marriage and medical alternatives to biological conception have also impacted on binary and heteronormative assumptions about marriage such as 'complementarity' and are addressed in Chapter 2.

To be congruent with its use of 'complementarity' in the response to the government consultation on civil marriage for same-sex couples, the Church of England reaffirmed its traditional doctrine that marriage was only for mixed-sex couples (House of Bishops, 2014). Clergy were not permitted by the Church to convert their civil partnership to civil marriage, or to marry in a civil ceremony, if they sought to continue to hold a bishop's licence to minister as a priest in the Church of England. Clergy who chose to marry their civil partner tested the Church's prohibition in law, but resigned their licences when they lost. Others chose to marry, relinquished their licences and ceased to be practising parish priests.[47]

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[46] Sentamu, J. (2012, May 17). *A response on marriage and civil partnerships* (Section II). Retrieved from https://www.archbishopofyork.org/news/news-archive-previous-years/response-marriage-and-civil-partnerships

[47] Father Andrew Foreshew-Cain resigned to marry. (Hellen, N. (2017, April 30). *Vicar quits with blast at 'homophobic' church*. The Sunday Times. London. Retrieved from https://www.thetimes.co.uk/edition/news/vicar-quits-with-blast-at-homophobic-church-ckmmnv3db)
Canon Jeremy Pemberton, a senior NHS hospital chaplain, married in April 2014. (2016, December 7). *Pemberton v The Right Reverend Richard Inwood, former acting bishop of Southwell & Nottingham*. Retrieved from https://www.employmentcasesupdate.co.uk/site.aspx?i=ed33284)

While some married, same-sex couples and civil partners continued to be members of Church of England congregations (participants Rob, and Luke), other couples found the Church's lack of welcome problematic and drifted away (participants Steve, and Kate). Practising clergy expressed a sense of conflict between their priesthood and partnership (Clare Herbert, in Bennett, et al., 2018, p. 48).[48] The Church's absence of recognition in liturgy (through a service or blessing for same-sex couples, whether civil partners or married) led to pastoral and missional concerns of exclusion, injustice and inequality voiced by participants in this research. These challenges are addressed in the following sections and chapters.

No change in the Church of England

The Church's steadfast adherence to marriage between one man and one woman was reiterated in the Archbishops' letter and the appended House of Bishops' statement and guidelines to clergy and people of the Church of England (House of Bishops, 2014, Appendix, para. 24). The policy, originally issued after civil partnerships were introduced in 2005, continued so that ceremonies (services) for same-sex couples after their civil partnership or marriage were not permitted in Church of England churches. Clergy were prohibited from praying for God's blessing for couples in a same-sex civil union (2014, Appendix, para. 19–21). Such couples, seeking to celebrate their legal union in the Church of England, were to be offered pastoral prayers in private, but not a blessing.[49]

This doctrine (normative theology) of mixed-sex marriage in the Church of England is expressed in its teaching and in the liturgical ceremonies performed in churches, celebrating traditional mixed-sex marriage and the blessing of mixed-sex civil marriage. Within the Church of England, there are active Christians in same-sex civil unions who include clergy families living in vicarages, organists and musicians involved in regular worship, members of congregations in lay roles, as well as regular worshippers. None of these are permitted to celebrate their civil partnership or marriage in a church service or receive a prayer for God's blessing from a priest, in the Church of England.

[48] See participants' narratives in Chapters 2 and 3.
[49] Your Church Wedding. (n. d.). *Information for same-sex couples.* Retrieved from https://www.yourchurchwedding.org/article/information-for-same-sex-couples/

However, the Archbishops had recognised and affirmed the presence of two of the three virtues[50] that commend marriage, the presence of 'genuine mutuality and fidelity,' embodied in same-sex relationships:

> We are conscious that within both Church and society there are men and women seeking to live faithfully in covenanted same sex relationships. As we said in our response to the consultation prior to the same sex marriage legislation, "the proposition that same sex relationships can embody crucial social virtues is not in dispute. Same sex relationships often embody genuine mutuality and fidelity…., two of the virtues which the Book of Common Prayer uses to commend marriage. The Church of England seeks to see those virtues maximised in society" (House of Bishops, 2014).

The Church's submission (2012) to the UK government consultation had argued against marriage reform because 'civil partnerships have, however, already provided a framework within which same sex couples can exhibit the social virtues of fidelity and mutuality' (2012, p. 4, para. 14). The language adopted, of mutuality and fidelity as 'social virtues' (2012, 2014) and 'benefits' (2012) of marriage, was also applied to the third benefit in the Church's submission to the Government, 'biological complementarity' (2012). While 'men and women seeking to live faithfully in covenanted same sex relationships' (2014) often embodied two of the three 'benefits' according to the Church, the submission was clear that such couples *could not embody biologically* the primary traditional 'cause of matrimony' (1662): 'for the procreation… of children' (Canon B30, Church of England, 2014). By adopting the binary and essentialist language of complementarity, the Church's submission to the Government (2012) shifted the emphasis of traditional marriage from 'the procreation and nurture of children' (Canon B30) to 'biological complementarity which, for many, includes the possibility of procreation' (2012). This, the Church argued, therefore restricted marriage to 'one man and one woman.'

In Western ancient philosophy and throughout premodernity, a single sex theory of basic human anatomy had prevailed (with women's bodies as an inferior version), where 'gender was often viewed as unstable and slippery' between men and women (Isherwood and Stuart (1998, p. 71, Middleton, 2018, pp. 1-4). Descartes' thinking in the first half of the 17th century fostered 'profound body/soul dualism,' leading to a 'radical distinction between

[50] The terminology 'social virtues' used by the archbishops is not necessarily the same as the 'virtues' of marriage in a religious context.

male and female bodies' and a two-sex theory. From the 18th century and particularly after the 19th (Laqueur, 1990), modern society interpreted biological sexual difference as a basis for 'fundamental, ontological differences' between the two sexes, consigning each to separate spheres (Isherwood & Stuart, 1998, p. 72). In a social context of debate on equality and rights in the late 18th century, genteel women were protected from worldly 'pollution' by sheltering them from public life, restricted to the domestic sphere.[51] The balance in marriage was upheld 'by emphasizing and maintaining the mental, emotional, and practical differences between the sexes' (Coontz, 2005, p. 153).

Roman Catholic teaching in the 20th century developed its argument against women's ordination from the separation of spheres by sex (1976, in Hogan, 2015, p. 325). A theology of biological complementarity[52] was reiterated and emphasized under Pope John Paul II (1960s, published 1981, in Hogan, 2015, p. 326). This doctrine has been critiqued widely within the Roman Catholic Church (2015, p. 336) and has never been adopted as a doctrine by the Church of England through the General Synod. However, the language of sexual difference and gender complementarity, with associated separate spheres and roles, seeped into Church of England statements on theological anthropology (Shaw, 2015, pp. 345-346) including on marriage (2015, p. 354, referring to (Church of England, 2013)).

Following the recommendation of the Pilling Report (House of Bishops, 2013) and after a two-year process of facilitated listening, the House of Bishops proposed 'no change to ecclesiastical law or to the Church of England's existing doctrinal position on marriage and sexual relationships' (Church of England, 2017, para. 26a).

[51] However, most women were restricted (as were most men and, with industrial mechanization, children) by social and economic factors requiring long working hours for subsistence from this period. Restricted 'genteel' but impecunious women had different limited expectations (Worsley, 2017). Rapid changes in marriage did not occur significantly until the 20th century (Coontz, 2005).

[52] 'This doctrine of complementarity is based on the claim that the differences between male and female are ontological, not social, part of our essential anthropological makeup… Indeed, throughout the tradition, one can see evidence of [a] hierarchical interpretation of gender complementarity' (Hogan, 2015, pp. 325-326). The Roman Catholic 'tradition holds that the nature of marriage is premised on this natural gender complementarity' leading to the exclusion of sexual activity beyond a married man and woman (2015, p. 334). Hogan concluded that 'the traditional views on women and gendered bodies have been completely repudiated' along with some of the Church's teachings on sexual morality (2015, p. 336). However, the debate within the Roman Catholic Church continues: an educational document 'Male and female he created them' has been published. (Agence France Presse. (2019, June 11) *Vatican launches guide to tackle 'educational crisis' on gender*. Retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jun/11/vatican-launches-guide-to-tackle-educational-crisis-on-gender?CMP=share_btn_link)

Impact of changes in civil law on parish practice leading to this research

My research question on meanings of equal marriage within the Church of England arose from parish practice diverging from the Church's traditional teaching and liturgies. Three overlapping areas generated my concern that the Church was requiring me (as a parish priest) to discriminate on the grounds of gender and sexuality: my pastoral conversations with couples preparing for marriage during 20 years of ordained ministry; my service on General Synod;[53] and my pastoral encounters with same-sex couples in committed relationships, including clergy colleagues and parishioners.

Through qualitative research conducted with interviews, this research contributes in-depth evidence from 'practices of faithful Christian people [who are] themselves already the bearers of theology; they express the contemporary living tradition of the Christian faith' (Cameron, et al., 2010, p. 51). In particular, the nine clergy (within my sample of 12) offer qualitative evidence through this research into a gap in knowledge 'about how individual clergy at parishioner level deal with the issue of homosexuality' within their contexts (Kirby, et al., 2017, p. 913) because they 'demonstrate that Christian belief and same-sex marriage can be integrated' (2017, p. 914) in different ways.

In the week when the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013 received royal assent,[54] I presented a conference paper in York raising the question of equal marriage as an Anglican ideal (Henwood, 2015). From my parish practice I had recognised that 'the Church of England… could offer a theology of the rich complexity of Christian human living to our society' (2015, p. 22) in the varied stories of different people and couples coming for weddings in my churches. These enquiries, however, were not only from the mixed-sex couples the Church hoped to welcome through the Weddings Project (2007).

My professional practice preparing and officiating at wedding and blessing ceremonies – with mixed-sex couples – was a rich and varied matrix of interactions performed together. Couples enacted their marriage with words, symbols, particular attire and ritual actions in sacred churches, witnessed by their guests and facilitated by a Church of England priest who also acted as registrar. The bride and groom married each other, dating back to Roman law where consent of both with contractual vows freely made were the marks of a legitimate marriage,[55] followed by marital affection (Boswell, 1995, p. 51). Since the Church

[53] 2005–9.
[54] Royal assent: 17th July 2013.
[55] See page 352 and footnote 212 for reference to Roman law in a legal case in 2018.

of England permitted the marriage of divorced people (2002), many couples expected their parish church to welcome them, for marriage, or a blessing after civil union.

After 2006, some same-sex couples who formalised their relationships (in a civil partnership, or marriage after 2014) sought to celebrate their unions in the Church of England alongside their mixed-sex peers. Worshipping churchgoers and parishioners in same-sex unions were among those who sought God's blessing in church, with their parish priest officiating, in the presence of their families, friends and congregation. They discovered that, because the Church of England's ceremonies are not permitted for same-sex couples, all the rich and varied interactions and rituals in the sacred place of their parish church are denied to them. The Church of England's normative theology of marriage as between one man and one woman prevents and prohibits the recognition in church of same-sex committed relationships that are legal unions under civil law. Couples are refused prayers for God's blessing through the Church's clergy in the community's sacred places. Clergy must refuse their requests and, indeed, clergy are not permitted to pray for God's blessing with the couple in private. Guests, families and congregations within the Church of England experience the impact resulting from this theology as exclusion by the national Church of same-sex couples (narrated in Chapters 2 and 3). Whilst English civil law to enable the social acceptance of same-sex couples in legal, public unions has moved into the mainstream in the secular context, the Church of England has remained static in its theology and, in addition, prohibited pastoral practice by clergy who would in conscience offer prayer for God's blessing.

This research argues that there are within the Church of England voices and new theologies emerging towards equal relationships of marriage, and of partnership, based on Christian foundations of mutuality and fidelity, with responsible choices for parenting and the nurture of children. By engaging with these nuanced theologies, I propose (in Chapter 4) that the Church can provide and pilot reformed alternatives to liturgies to celebrate in varied ways, in churches. To participate in the Church's process of discernment and debate, my research design employs three theoretical frameworks for theological enquiry, with associated literature, bringing a range of formal voices of theology into conversation.

The formal academic context: research design

In this research project I interrogated tensions between the Church of England's doctrine and participants' lived experience in dialogue with literature in three theoretical frameworks: human gender and sexuality, human rights and liberation theologies, and narrative theologies. My design established a postliberal, interdisciplinary openness to possibilities of plural interpreted meanings located in particular contexts through narrative theologies, rather than binary – thus dichotomous – thinking about propositions or experience claims.

The following sections develop three theoretical frameworks for my research methodology. A summary of the key voices and concepts I adopted to interpret my research is in the introduction to my methodology (page 52).

The theoretical framework of human gender and sexuality

Three sources of literature resourced this framework: The Church of England's House of Bishops, General Synod and canon law, with alternative voices from within the Church; academic research; and Government reports on contemporary lifestyles.

The Church of England

The Church of England teaches that 'the Christian understanding and doctrine of marriage [is] as a lifelong union between one man and one woman,' (Church of England, 2012, based on Canon B30) reiterated (Church of England, 2014) after the Pilling Report by a working group on human sexuality (House of Bishops, 2013). This normative theology was explained in a further teaching document that year, that 'persons are not asexual, but are either male or female' based on a theology of creation where human beings 'share with many animal species the sexual differentiation of male and female, serving the tasks of reproduction and the nurture of children' (Church of England, 2013, p. 9, para. 26, p. 4, para. 11). This focus on male and female biological sexual difference is asserted as essential to heteronormative marriage as one of 'many benefits to society, which include mutuality, fidelity and biological complementarity with the possibility of procreation' (Church of England, 2012, para. 6). Against the Government's proposal to widen civil marriage to same-sex couples, the Church argued that

> the uniqueness of marriage – and a further aspect of its virtuous nature – is that it embodies the underlying, objective, distinctiveness of men and women. This distinctiveness and complementarity are seen most explicitly in the biological union of man and woman which potentially brings to the relationship the fruitfulness of procreation. And, even where, for reasons of age, biology or simply choice, a marriage does not have issue, the distinctiveness of male and female is part of what gives marriage its unique social meaning (2012, para. 10).

Evidence from practice of the diversity of sex, gender and sexuality, and of varied patterns of parenting, are brought into conversation in this research with theories and theologies from academic literature, to critique the Church's statements and challenge the epistemology of 'the objective, distinctiveness of men and women,' and of 'complementarity… seen most explicitly in the biological union of man and woman.'

The House of Bishop's report to General Synod 'favoured guidance to clergy which stopped short of either Authorised or Commended liturgies' (Church of England, 2017, para. 42). A pastoral provision for couples marrying after divorce – a 'Commended' Service of Prayer and Dedication after Civil Marriage (Archbishops' Council, 2000, pp. 173–183) – had been provided in 1985 while the Church of England considered remarriage in Church under canon law. By 'stopp[ing] short' of a commended liturgy, the House of Bishops ruled out a similar pilot service for same-sex couples, preferring to propose future guidelines for clergy about pastoral prayer and the setting of 'careful boundaries' with a balance between 'what may not take place' and offering advice about what may (Church of England, 2017, para. 43).

Alternative voices within the Church

The House of Bishops recognised the presence within the Church of alternative voices and noted that Bishops place 'a high value on theological exploration and debate that is conducted with integrity. That is why Church of England clergy are able to argue for a change in its teaching on marriage and human sexuality' (House of Bishops, 2014, para. 25). My research project, conducted within a formal academic context with ethical approval, argues for change in the Church's teaching and practice through the subaltern voice of a practitioner-researcher and parish priest, co-researching with participants.[56]

[56] See methodology later in this chapter (page 52), and Ethics Approval (Portfolio).

Over 25 years ago, when same-sex relationships were still covert within the Church, Jeffrey John (1993)[57] wrote that same-sex couples need 'the same theological understanding of relationship that we offer to heterosexual couples… of permanent, faithful, stable love' (John, 2012, p. 6). The Church of England's debate on relationships is conducted in an international context of change and resistance to change in other provinces of the Anglican Communion. Archbishop Desmond Tutu[58] understood exclusion: 'for me, the question of human sexuality is really a matter of justice,' and apologised to LBGT people 'for the cruelty and injustice that you have suffered and continue to suffer at the hands of us, your fellow Anglicans' (Preface, in Robinson,[59] 2008, pp. xvii–xviii). Anglican Provinces including the USA (2012), Canada (2015), Scotland (2018), Brazil (2018) and New Zealand (2018) prepared for blessings of civil unions and considered marriage in Church for same-sex couples[60] while other provinces remain resolutely against change.[61] Resources for blessing same-sex couples (Heskins, 2001, Cotter, 2009) and official liturgies authorised by other Anglican provinces[62] may not be used in church in the Church of England (House of Bishops, 2014, para. 20–21).

During the UK Government's consultation on civil marriage, alternative voices from within the Church of England argued for the inclusion of same-sex couples. Linda Woodhead's research showed that 44% of Church of England members supported same-sex unions (2013). Peterson and McLean's survey of the legal history of marriage (2013) demonstrated that marriage law in England had changed throughout time, to argue that marriage was not

[57] *Permanent, faithful, stable: Christian same-sex relationships.* (1993. New edition and title, 2012.)
[58] Elected Archbishop of Cape Town, RSA, 1986-96. ((n. d.). *Desmond Tutu*. Retrieved from https://www.britannica.com/biography/Desmond-Tutu)
[59] Episcopal Bishop of New Hampshire, USA. (Pike, W. (2019, May 25). *V. Gene Robinson.* Retrieved from https://www.britannica.com/biography/V-Gene-Robinson)
[60] Episcopal Church of the USA. (2015). 2015-A054. Authorise trial use of marriage and blessing rites in "Liturgical Resources I". *Journal of the General Convention of...The Episcopal Church, Salt Lake City, 2015*. New York, USA: General Convention. pp. 778–781. Retrieved from https://episcopalarchives.org/cgi-bin/acts/acts_resolution-complete.pl?resolution=2015-A054
Anglican Church of Canada. (2005). *Report of the primate's theological commission of the Anglican Church of Canada on the blessing of same-sex unions. The St. Michael Report.* Retrieved from https://www.anglican.ca/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/StMichaelReport.pdf
The Scottish Episcopal Church. (2017, June 8). *Church votes to allow Equal Marriage.* Retrieved from https://www.scotland.anglican.org/church-votes-allow-equal-marriage/
[61] Among them, Rwanda, Uganda and Nigeria. (Cockburn, H. (2017, September 29). Anglican Church faces punishment after making history with UK's first same-sex church wedding. *The Independent.* Retrieved from https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/anglican-church-same-sex-wedding-gay-marriage-alistair-dinnie-peter-matthews-st-johns-edinburgh-a7974151.html)
[62] Episcopal Church in the USA. (2015). *Liturgical Resources 1: I will bless you and you will be a blessing*. *(Revised and expanded 2015.).* New York, USA: Church Publishing Inc.

fixed.[63] Robert Song proposed covenant relationship as a way of thinking anew about same-sex unions (2014). The serving area Bishop of Buckingham,[64] Alan Wilson, argued for recognition of same-sex couples within the Church (2014). Responses to the Church of England's submission (2012) and teaching document (2013) were published from clergy practitioners and theologians (Beardsley, 2014, Henwood, 2015, Shaw, 2015, Bradbury & Cornwall, 2016, Cornwall, 2017). Liverpool's serving bishop, Paul Bayes and retired bishop, James Jones, joined the debate on inclusion through contributions from the Evangelical strand within the Church of England (Ozanne, 2016).

However, the House of Bishops' report to General Synod advocated no change (Church of England, 2017a). The House of Clergy split, voting 100 against and 93 for adopting this report, which consequently failed to proceed because a simple majority vote was required in each House (of Bishops, Clergy and Laity).[65] Clergy supporting inclusion, who against their consciences are prohibited by the Church of England from blessing same-sex couples in legal unions, had made their voices heard. The Archbishops' response was to set terms of reference for work on 'Next Steps on Human Sexuality' (Church of England, 2017b) to provide an episcopal teaching document and a pastoral advisory group, aiming to report in early 2020. In October 2017, the Diocesan Synod of Hereford passed a motion to petition the House of Bishops for a service after same-sex civil unions as a matter of pastoral urgency.[66] A paper on the spiritual malaise of clergy in the Church of England arising from issues in practice of pastoral care contributed to a colloquium on Christian clergy wellbeing in June 2018 (Henwood, 2019). Alternative voices within the Church of England were actively engaging in dialogue with normative theology through synodical government, publications and formal research including this project.

[63] Peterson (from the USA) identified with the Church of England whilst resident in Oxford. McLean, from Scotland, was a Quaker. Their research covered the UK and USA, not only England.
[64] From 2003, in the Diocese of Oxford.
[65] British Broadcasting Corporation. (2017, February 15). *Church of England votes against same-sex marriage report.* Retrieved from https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-38982013
[66] 'That this Synod request the House of Bishops to commend an Order of Prayer and Dedication after the registration of a civil partnership or a same-sex marriage for use by ministers in exercise of their discretion under Canon B4, being a form of service neither contrary to, nor indicative of any departure from, the doctrine of the Church of England in any essential matter, together with guidance that no parish should be obliged to host, nor minister conduct, such a service.' Davies, M. (2017, October 27). Bishop of Hereford: same-sex blessings vote is 'right and consistent.' *Church Times.* Retrieved from https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2017/27-october/news/uk/hereford-same-sex-blessings-vote-is-right-and-consistent

Academic research and literature in the theoretical framework of human gender and sexuality

The first theoretical framework contributed research literature from the wide fields of: person-centred psychotherapy and theology; sex, gender and sexuality; and mutuality, fidelity and biological complementarity.

Person-centred approaches

Carl Rogers' psychotherapeutic 'person-centred approach,' rooted in practice beyond specialist theories of psychiatry and psychoanalysis, had a wide influence including on pastoral ministry (Kirschenbaum & Henderson, 1989, p. xi). Rogers identified three conditions in an active listener – genuineness with openness, acceptance with caring for the speaker, and empathic understanding – to enable people to tell their stories in a context of trust and presence (Rogers, 1986, pp. 135–137). This approach resonates (in my research and pastoral practice) with Adrian Thatcher's advocacy of a 'person-centred theology.' Thatcher critiqued the use of labels for concepts and issues of sexuality and gender that 'can sometimes conceal the real people who fall under these convenient classifications, together with their loves and longings, their joys and disappointments' (Thatcher, 2015, p. 13). In this research I argue that the Church of England's teaching on human sexuality and relationships rests on assumptions and terminology that have been deconstructed and widely challenged in the academy for over fifty years (Thatcher, 2015), so that a review of the Church's normative theologies of sexuality and gender is long overdue.[67] Thatcher warned that classifications labelling people by sexual behaviour or socially-assigned identities are impersonal, proposing that theology should be 'first of all about people, not about categories or practices' (2015, p. 13). He recognised the tension between marriage as a heterosexual institution and the common features of same-sex relationships with marriages (Thatcher, 1999, p. 301), researching implications for faithful Christian living and practices of marriage (Thatcher, 2011). Elizabeth Stuart rejected the modernist, essentialist perspectives: that people are consistent in behaviour from premodernity to the present, even when meanings and social contexts change; and that sexuality and gender are God-given categories of sexual orientation rather than interpretations within a particular social and cultural context (2015, pp. 21–22).

[67] The House of Bishops set up working groups in July 2017 (Church of England, 2017).

On sex, gender and sexuality

This theoretical framework references research generated in an intersectional matrix of diverse disciplines since the mid-20th century in the complex area of human identity and relationships. Kyle Harper recognised 'Christian sexual ideology, one of the most unlikely triumphs in the history of culture' that shifted the ancient social system towards normative monogamous marriage without additional sexual partners for men (2013, p. 1014). Arguing for research on monogamy where 'human nature cannot be studied apart from human culture and human history,' Harper sought to re-connect culture and nature within historical research. By reintegrating biology into history, Harper sought to move beyond conflicting explanatory models between essentialists and constructionists, giving an example of 'co-evolutionary, or dual-inheritance, theory' where 'culture drives genetic evolution, and genetic evolution drives culture' (2013, p. 1009). In the light of Harper's reconnection of culture and nature, I propose that Christianity's gradual development of a chaste, monogamous marriage norm (in parallel with celibate monastic life) may be interpreted as an example of a 'socially imposed monogamy' rather than ecologically imposed by processes of mating competition and parental care (2013, p. 1012). This, I argue, can provide a fruitful context for widening the Church's normative rules to include changing monogamous relationships of mutuality, fidelity, and parenting.

Cultural constructionists followed Foucault's studies of sexuality and classical antiquity (1976, 1984), countering earlier Darwinian approaches that researched human behaviour determined by nature (Harper, 2013, p. 986). Judith Butler argued 'that gender is "performed," not given,' disrupting traditional concepts of gender and desire as fixed, to reveal their cultural construction rather than essentialism (Butler, 1990, in Hoeft, 2012, p. 418, Hogan, 2015, p. 327). From the early 1990s queer theory influenced theology, because its methodology questioned the stability of identities, both human and divine (Cheng, 2015, p. 154). Susannah Cornwall argued that sex, sexuality and gender are three different attributes of human being: biological sex; cultural gender; and orientation in sexual attraction to a partner (2013, pp. 38, 45-57). Her critique of the Church's theory of gender complementarity argued that transgender and intersex people with embodied differences challenge binary, essentialist social norms, noting that the two-sex theory is recent in history (formerly one-sex, Laqueur, 1990) so that 'Christians should rethink their whole understanding of sex and gender' (Cornwall, 2010, in 2013, p. 56, 2015, p. 658). Christina Beardsley (2014) critiqued the adoption of 'a polarised, essentialist and complementary view of men and women' by the Church. She warned that the theory, of recent origins, has

pastoral and social dangers, 'nostalgic and uncritical, it is inhospitable to complexity, particularly gender variance, and the realities of transsexual and transgender people's lives.' Tina Beattie identified the recent development of Roman Catholic doctrine on essential sexual difference (1995-2004), that 'womanhood and manhood are complementary *not only from the physical and psychological points of view*, but also from the *ontological*' (Pope John Paul II (1995, emphasis original), in Beattie, 2015, p. 38).[68]

'Lived responses'[69] to the biblical scriptures

An essentialist theory of natal 'biological complementarity' [70] was deconstructed by Eugene Rogers on the ground of the nature of Christ, that 'difference cannot be reduced to male-female complementarity, because that would leave Jesus a deficient human being. Jesus did not need a female other half to be fully human' (2004, p. 29). Ben Fulford reiterated the priority of the stories about Jesus in the New Testament, following Frei (in 2016, p. 47) to propose that the scriptures can be read 'primarily as testimonies to the identities of God and creatures, and as patterns proposed to the people of God for discerning their lived response to God… critically governed by the way scripture identifies God and human beings in relation to Jesus Christ' (2016, p. 60). Nine participants in this research were clergy in parish practice, ministering in 'lived response to God… in relation to Jesus Christ' through engagement with the scriptures for regular worship, preaching and teaching.[71] Their reflective, performed practices in Christian community liturgies of baptism, marriage and the Eucharist resonate through operant and espoused theologies in the following chapters, with academic literature and the scriptures in this research. This praxis between liturgy and theological reflection on practice engages with Stuart's argument, that Christian baptism expresses the Church's role as a community where God in Christ transgresses cultural expectations, to reveal 'that the rhythm of the divine is that of inclusion rather than exclusion' (Stuart, 2015, p. 25, referencing Rogers (1999) and Kathy Rudy (1997)). Rogers argued that in the pre-Reformation era interpretive reading of scripture was expected: the meaning of biblical text 'is a collection of possible readings. Diversity is *required*' (in Thatcher, 2015, p. 55, emphasis original). He asserted that 'arguments from the liturgy… are among the strongest, because they resonate with what churchgoers' have heard, sung

[68] See also 'Biological complementarity' on page 21.
[69] (Fulford, 2016, p. 60).
[70] Underlying the third benefit of marriage in the Church's understanding of an 'intrinsic nature of marriage as a union of one man and one woman' (Church of England, 2012).
[71] Three participants who were lay people within the Church of England were in professional roles in secular fields, living their responses to the scriptures where they worked, rooted in church communities at home.

and performed from childhood. *Lex orandi* (literally, 'prayed law') is performed in ritual, symbol and language, an argument that demonstrated the traditional marriage rite in the USA was already suitable for non-heteronormative relationships (Rogers, 2015, p. 60).

Research on liturgy

John Boswell published original texts with translations of liturgies from Eastern Churches for mixed- and same-sex couples (1995), a source of premodern *lex orandi* from liturgies of blessing considered in this research dialogue in Chapter 4. I include these texts because firstly, they are manuscript evidence of premodern prayed rituals in churches with priests officiating and secondly, because the premodern symbols, actions and words resonate with current Church of England pastoral practice.

Boswell's interpretation of the liturgies' meanings as 'same-sex unions' was widely critiqued. He had argued that, through time and Christian culture, a continuity of same-sex contact provided grounds for a history of homosexuality and same-sex marriage, using recently-termed concepts and language. This was critiqued as a view of history by Kyle Harper and Alan Bray as essentialist (Harper, 2013, p. 1004, Bray, 2000, p. 15, 2003, p. 316). Bray identified two major objections undermining Boswell's interpretation: that the liturgical rite for blessing two men (or women) did not envisage sexual intercourse, and that the rite was not an alternative to marriage and could be in addition to a legally-contracted marriage (Bray, 2000, p. 16). Bray critiqued three contradictory interpretations of sworn brotherhood (similar to the ritual of brother-making) in premodern Western Europe: that such alliances aimed to curtail violence (Shaw); that they were business partnerships to manage risk in a form of insurance (McFarlane); and that two men chose to enter into a bond of love and fraternity already developing between them (Boswell) (Bray, 2003, pp. 37-38). These suggestions, Bray argued, all expressed 'an impoverished, a positivist view of history' reduced to plain facts where their contextual traces can be dismissed (2003, pp. 203-204).

Reviewers of Boswell (1995) agreed that publication of the liturgies themselves and annotated translations were of interest, 'a painstaking, scholarly and generally cautious examination of ceremonies' (Stuart, 1994).[72] Reviewers disagreed with Boswell's use of the term 'same-sex union' to reject simplistic correlation between pre-modern rites and

[72] Bennison, C. (1994). Book Review. *Anglican Theological Review, 77*(2), 256-259. Wilken, R. (1994). Book Review. *Commonweal*, *121*(15), 24. Shaw, B. (1994). A groom of one's own? *The New Republic*. 18-25 July, 33-40.

contemporary same-sex relationships. Boswell had similarly rejected correlation between premodern and contemporary marriage (1995, p. 38).

Bray agreed there could be 'no simple passage' from premodern liturgies to their use to recognise friendship today but proposed a way forward with two strands. Firstly, to reframe ethical questions from sexual ethics to consider 'a potential plurality of families' beyond blood relationships to wider Christian kinship (expressed in baptism and eucharist). Secondly, the possibility of a liturgy of prayer and blessing that could enable the contemporary Church 'to recognise the potential for good in the relationships being blessed' (Bray 2000, p. 31). In Chapter 4, I bring evidence from the premodern liturgies (Boswell, 1995), Bray's research into Western Latin sworn brotherhood as a form of kinship ritual, and his argument for the role of liturgy in reconciling 'theological with pastoral imperatives' (2000, p. 17), into conversation with contemporary participants' narratives.

Philip Reynolds (1994) recognised 'an interesting and plausible thesis' albeit 'buried' in Boswell's book (1995), that although premodern Christian culture had no concept of same-sex marriage or homosexuality, the liturgical rites for brother-making were recognised both by the Church as an institution and in premodern social contexts. Reynolds evaluated the rites as providing scope to express such relationships formally in ways that, though lost in the late mediaeval and modern eras, could be considered in the contemporary debate if arguments for change were to develop. He referred to the discussion on the ordination of women as priests,[73] where, he asserted, some tradition was 'honestly abandon[ed]' and some theologians adopted 'an historical, relativist hermeneutic to locate some deeper stream within the tradition' (Reynolds, 1994, p. 49).

In the introduction to my research methodology (page 52), I propose that my participants are 'competent speakers of the religion' (Lindbeck), whose theologies are rooted in reflective parish practice lived in response to the biblical scriptures, and whose subaltern voices can express 'deeper stream[s] within the tradition.'

[73] For a summary of the debates in the Anglican Communion see Shaw (2015, pp. 340-346). Shaw linked the debates on women's ordination: that 'cultural norms about gender, especially around sexual difference and… gender complementarity, also affect the discussions on sexuality' (2015, p. 346). For an overview of theological and pastoral issues arising from the Church of England's debates and introduction of women's ordination and consecration, including the Church's theology of sex and gender, see Percy, E. (2017). Women, ordination and the Church of England: an ambiguous welcome. *Feminist Theology*. *26*(1), 90-100. https://doi.org/10.1177/0966735017714405

Mutuality, fidelity, and biological complementarity

My research builds on academic research into unions and friendship exploring the practice and meanings of human relationships. According to Stuart (2015), Carter Heyward identified mutuality in relationships, where desire seeks the wellbeing of the beloved 'bringing forth God into the midst of our lives,' grounded in friendship.[74] Stuart summarised virtues Heyward associated with mutuality, as the arbiter of right relating: courage, compassion, anger, forgiveness, touch, healing and faith. By relating rightly in reflective living, and focusing on actual relationships, tradition can be interrogated to discern 'whether the divine is manifest… or not,' but care is needed not 'to identify God with a particular experience' (Stuart, 2015, pp. 22-24).

Mutuality, the first of the Church of England's benefits of marriage (2012) and third virtue (2014) or cause (1662) of marriage, is a lived value for human committed relationships that is affirmed and extended in Chapters 2 and 3, in a dialogue between participants' theologies and the tradition of the Church.

The potential of constructed friendship based on Jesus's command to his followers to 'love one another as I have loved you' (John 15.12-14) offers a pattern of fidelity to follow (Summers, 2015, pp. 701–3). Summers warned that by contrast with friendship 'based on the recognition of, and a commitment to, equality and reciprocity,' traditional marriages can 'mask a power/gender imbalance' (2015, p. 697), an insight that resonates with changes in marriage law in Chapter 2. Fidelity is the second of the Church of England's benefits and virtues of marriage (2012, 2014) or causes of matrimony (1662), brought into the dialogue in this research.

In Chapters 2 and 3 of this research I argue that participants' relationships – of marriage and of civil partnership – are founded on and expressed by mutuality and fidelity. I argue that this convergence resonates with Sarah Coakley's identification of a need for 'living examples of how to live beyond the end of sexuality and gender… according to a proper erotic asceticism' (in Stuart, 2015, p. 28). In Chapters 3 and 4 I argue that when the committed relationships of Christians within the Church of England are acknowledged as embodying mutuality and fidelity, the focus can shift to 'a proper erotic asceticism' to engage anew with Christian chastity expressed in marriage or partnership.

[74] Stuart critiqued Heyward's lack of detail on how friendship grounded sexual relating (2015, p. 23).

Once sexual and gender stereotypes are deconstructed and no longer have the power of essentialist foundations, 'queer,' 'indecent' or 'limping' theologies reveal the exclusion of people by systems based on binary gender and heteronormative relationships, by engaging with 'non-normative' people to revitalise liberationist theologies (Hoeft, 2012, Beattie, 2015). I argue from this research that queer theologies of godly right relationship and erotic asceticism can be expressed in committed unions of marriage and partnership that are based on equality and reciprocity as particular forms of friendship, embodying two of the benefits of marriage, mutuality and fidelity. Because such unions may choose to have children or not, regardless of the natal sex and cultural gender of the couple, I propose in Chapter 2 a reframing of the Church of England's third benefit of marriage[75] from an essentialist biological complementarity (2012) to recognise optional, responsible choices for parenting and the nurture of children. This reframing and shift of emphasis to union as a Christian constructed friendship has the potential, I propose, for future theological reflection on the natures of Christian post-sexuality asceticism, sacred sexuality and pro/creative union with or without parenting.

This research does not follow Robert Song, who retained the 'connection in creation' (2014, p. 26) to propose a category of child-free 'non-procreative covenant partnership' distinguished from procreative marriage (2014, p. 37) 'as two separate vocations' (2014, p. 81). Song's discussion of civil partnership as potentially a covenant relationship to be celebrated in church proposed 'it would repeat firmly in the public realm the idea that marriage in creation is sexually differentiated because of its openness to procreation' (2014, p. 84). This, I argue, retained binary gender essentialism and heteronormativity as foundations for a theory of biological complementarity underlying the Church's 'intrinsic nature of marriage' limited to mixed-sex couples.

By contrast, sociological research on same-sex marriage concluded that, rather than be placed in a special category (see Song, above), 'most of our couples just wanted 'ordinary' things for their relationships. They modelled their relationships on a concept of the ordinary rather than on the radically different.' Countering binary gender essentialism and critiquing gender construction, their research 'provides support for an understanding of gender as an *interactional flow* rather than just an acquired characteristic' (Heaphy, Smart, & Einarsdottir, (2013), p. 166, emphasis original).[76] Civil-partnered participants in this

[75] The Church of England's traditional first virtue (2014) or cause of marriage (1662) was expressed as *the procreation of children*, not as biological complementarity.
[76] See below, 'normative arguments' in law on page 42.

research expressed this sense of being ordinary in relationships, regardless of gender and sexuality. For Luke, 'on a very sort of basic, ordinary level, if, if you're in a couple, of any sort, you're in a couple' (below, page 90). Comments from guests, during the reception following a Eucharist (in a secular venue) on the day after Rob's civil partnership, were that 'this is the new normal' within the Church as well as society. Rob and his civil partner sought to 'model that normality' (below, page 92). Narratives explore participants' theologies in the following chapters of this research.

Government reports

Reports published by the Government's Office of National Statistics provided data on contemporary lifestyles, with commentary. This quantitative data and interpretation informed the social context for couples' practices of relationships, unions and family life within which marriage in the Church of England and Church blessings of civil marriages (mixed-sex) were located. In addition, parliamentary records of consultation papers, legislation and legal commentary on marriage and divorce aided understanding of the nuanced changes relevant to this research.

The theoretical framework of human rights and liberation theologies

The second theoretical framework for this research included literature on language and power, legal reports, and news reports on contemporary social change.

Language and power

Sociologist Marta Trzebiatowska warned theologians that 'unless the tools of emancipation are drawn from outside of the religious traditions they aim to undermine, the potential for subversion, and in effect change, may be slight' (2015, pp. 132-3). She argued that 'collective efforts, not individual action, lead to gradual transformation of seemingly monolithic structures,' an assertion I interpret to support in-depth, qualitative research with a small sample as well as civil rights movements involving large numbers of people. Rather than limiting themselves to 'subversive practices in private,' participants in this research have recognised that 'their actions only count if they have tangible social consequences,' by becoming co-researchers in formal academic enquiry (Mason, 2002, p. 55).[77]

[77] See Appendix 1.

According to Elaine Graham, liberation theologies reveal three motifs in the use of language: 'the political imperative of excavating hidden lives; the cathartic and existential power of giving voice to experience; and the need for theology to speak in the authentic language and culture' (2007, p. 47). A range of liberationist theologies informed this research: emancipatory (Ramsay, 2012), feminist (Graham, 2012), body (Isherwood & Stuart, 1998), and queer theologies (Hoeft, 2012, Cheng, 2015). The theoretical framework of human rights and liberation theologies prioritises the recognition of power that underlies doctrines and practices: the 'asymmetry' of voices in the church,[78] the 'abyss of speechlessness'[79] for 'those who are voiceless and invisible'[80] and the theory of 'muted groups.'[81]

Researchers in gender theory followed Foucault (1976-1990) and Laqueur (1990) to critique gender and sexual identities and the power used to sustain cultural traditions that excluded non-normative people and relationships (Beattie, 2015, pp. 32-34). Feminist theologians following Valerie Saiving (1960) deconstructed patriarchal assumptions in reading scriptural texts (Trible, 1978), revealed the exclusion of women's voices (Christ & Plaskow, in Walton, 2007, pp. 5-7), explored women's spiritual quest (Christ, in Walton 2007, p. 6) and restored women's voices through engagement with literature (Walton, 2007, 2011). Walton highlighted Plaskow's continuity with the Jewish Midrash tradition, where interpretations, revisions and stories constructed around sacred texts enable the Bible to engage with the present. I propose that this research with participants within the Church of England co-constructs narratives around sacred texts and liturgies in a tradition of 'feminist midrash… a reflection of contemporary beliefs and experiences, [where] its root conviction is utterly traditional' (Plaskow, in Walton, 2007, p. 7).

Walton and Krondorfer found that 'gay scholarship' was an 'almost complete silence' in theological publications, 'a colossal non-response' that Krondorfer attributed to indifference, radical transgression of disciplinary boundaries, the 'gaying' of religion, autobiographical insertions and erotic confessions (in Walton 2007, pp. 32-33). Walton recognised among heteronormative people 'a repugnance at the return of the repressed' not only for non-heterosexuals but also for women's bodily texts so that in a 'postfeminist millennium, it is more profitable not to speak about them at all' (2007, p. 33).

[78] Cameron et al., (2010, pp. 59–60).
[79] Scarry, (quoted by Bieler & Schottroff, 2007, p. 169).
[80] Procter-Smith, (1990, p. 162).
[81] Ardener, (quoted by Stewart & Coleman, (2015, p. 115).

Deconstruction through gender, feminist and queer theories among liberationist theologies informs this research, to challenge the Church's normative theology that excludes people and relationships outside its traditional boundaries. This research framework recognises the problematic atmosphere of a postfeminist millennium in Church discourse, with difficulty in hearing non-conforming narratives of human sexuality that may hamper the voicing and excavating of hidden lives.

Walton warned that societies can manage minorities by marginalising them as a way to defend its dominant cultural norms, preferring to 're-idealise rather than denaturalise heterosexual norms' (McNay, 2000, in Walton, 2007, p. 115). The Church of England's working groups have been criticised for a bias in gender,[82] and a bias in sexuality by the exclusion of same-sex married couples and some non-binary people in the Church, marginalising minorities and undermining the Church's process: 'It is an insult to married gay and lesbian couples to refuse to acknowledge our marriages, and the erasure of bisexuality and the insistence on simple binaries shows just how deeply out of touch the LLF [Living in Love and Faith] project is with the reality of the wider debate in society and the Church' (Foreshew-Cain, 2018).[83]

Law and news reports

This theoretical framework includes consultation documents and summaries issued by the UK Government (for England), as well as references to enacted civil laws, and legal literature and commentaries on changing legal practices for marriage, divorce, adoption and civil partnership. In addition, given that the national debate on these areas continued to be highly active during this research, news reports and think-tank recommendations published online and in print are sources of legal outcomes from court cases and of interpretation from social data.

Twenty years ago, Michael Freeman[84] surveyed the legal situation in England, asking 'Is there a case for same sex marriages?' He concluded,

[82] The membership composition of the two groups was 21 male to 8 female, immediately noted as 'unconscious bias.' (Humphreys, J. (2017, July 22). *Unconscious bias at General Synod, July 2017*. Retrieved from WATCH website: https://womenandthechurch.org/news/unconscious-bias-general-synod-july-2017/)

[83] Church Times. (2018, November 9). *Letters to the editor: from the Revd Andrew Foreshew-Cain*. Retrieved from https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2018/9-november/comment/letters-to-the-editor/letters-to-the-editor

[84] Michael Freeman, currently Emeritus Professor**,** Faculty of Laws, University College London. (n. d.). Retrieved from https://www.ucl.ac.uk/laws/people/prof-michael-freeman

> Overcoming prejudice – which remains at the root of most opposition – will be difficult. For those prepared to engage in a rational debate, the normative arguments are now clear…. If we believe in autonomy, and if we believe that the institution of marriage is a valuable one, one which upholds our highest ideals, it is difficult to justify depriving homosexuals and lesbians of this treasured form of human association (Freeman, 1999, p. 13).

Freeman's summary of arguments added an issue he identified as hitherto ignored, 'that marriage is also about responsibility.' He argued that 'marriage is about both privacy and intimacy but it is also about commitment, attachment and caring' and that 'there is no reason to believe that the values and experiences of domestic life are any different for homosexual couples' (1999, p. 12). Albeit using language that differs from the Church of England, this 'normative vision of what functions are important to marriage as an institution' resonates with the Church's language of mutuality and fidelity as virtues and benefits recognised in both marriage and civil partnerships (2014), and with my research participants' narratives in the following chapters.

In the USA early in the new millennium, federal states opposing 'marriage equality' tested their cases in the Supreme Court, with defence lawyers and judges using the language and precedence of civil rights.[85] Scot Peterson and Iain McLean argued for three particular areas to be addressed in the debate on marriage reform in the UK and USA: rigorous respect for freedom of religion and belief; distinction between 'public reason' whilst protecting 'reasonable comprehensive doctrines' of people in particular belief systems; and a mature federalism that permits difference in law respecting different contexts (2013, p. 213). Their forecast, if the book's data projections were correct, was that 'within twenty years [of 2013] marriage between two people of the same sex will be no more controversial than marriage of a man and his deceased wife's sister.'[86] Whilst this proved true in England under civil law (from 2014), there has been no change in canon law for marriage, although the Church of England acknowledged that 'public debate has moved on from toleration… to the call for full equality as a basic human right' (House of Bishops, 2013, para. 47).

Literature and research in the first two theoretical frameworks led me to narrative approaches in theology and qualitative research, the third framework.

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[85] Machacek, D., & Fulco, A. (2004). The courts and public discourse: The case of gay marriage. *Journal of Church and State, 46*(4)*,* 767–785.

[86] A precedent for social and legal change cited by participant Rob (page 130 and footnote 205).

The theoretical framework of narrative in theology and research

The third theological framework draws on formal voices from literature to inform this research: a postliberal cultural-linguistic approach, constructive and canonical narrative theologies, and narrative methods of analysis, interpretation and writing in qualitative research.

Postliberal cultural-linguistic approaches

George Lindbeck (1984) identified a cultural-linguistic character of religions within their own particular contexts. Adherents to a religion learned to live a cultural tradition in a similar way to learning a particular language, performing within a dynamic, creative framework of rules analogous to speaking framed by grammar. He proposed that purposive myths and narratives within a culture build human social identities and communities, enacted in powerful, communal rituals, to structure human experience and the social understanding of people's place in the world. This approach, from Lindbeck's experience of ecumenical dialogue and contact with interdisciplinary academic research, sought to facilitate theological argument beyond opposing conceptual frameworks of either preliberal cognitive-propositional tradition or liberal experiential-expressivist innovation. Postliberal cultural-linguistic theologies would foster debates around the concepts and grammar underlying a religion, rather than from theologies based on propositions or experiences, which were always polarised (1984, pp. 16-17).

Lindbeck's insights from interdisciplinary academic research aided description and understanding of a religion practised in the complexity of a community's way of life. Following cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz, he adopted 'thick description' of a religion as a particular form of cultural context. This approach pays attention 'from the direction of exceedingly extended acquaintances with extremely small matters' (Geertz) because 'only by detailed "familiarity with the imaginative universe in which … acts are signs" can one diagnose and specify the meaning of these acts for the adherents of a religion' (Lindbeck, 2002, p. 175, quoting Geertz). Lindbeck advocated thick description as 'the full range of the interpretive medium' with a 'creative aspect' because a religious context permeates adherents' lives (2002, p. 175). He concluded that 'theological description can be a highly constructive enterprise' because powers of imagination and invention are required to explore and reveal new meanings. This painstaking, engaged and detailed approach underlies my research methodology as a practitioner-researcher in long-term contact

within a religious culture, to generate thick description for interpretation to answer my research question.

Lindbeck argued for intratextual faithfulness to the holy scripture of a religion, where meanings are immanent in the language of the texts (2002, p. 176). For Christianity, the canonical narrative of the Bible focuses on the interaction of God with humankind, with the climax in the gospel stories of Jesus of Nazareth. Adherents, according to an intratextual reading, 'are to be conformed to the Jesus Christ depicted in the narrative,' deriving an interpretive framework for making theological sense from the literary structure of the text (Lindbeck, 2002, p. 180). 'The primary focus is… how life is to be lived and reality construed in the light of God's character… as this is depicted in the stories of Israel and of Jesus' (2002, p. 181). In this research project, participants refer to biblical texts to interpret their lives and practice, evidence that their religion permeates their lives and beliefs (operant and espoused theologies in the following chapters) in the integrity of their faith (2002, p. 194). Postliberal debate enables argument about 'where proper grammar is to be found, [and] who are the competent speakers of a religious language' (2002, p. 173). Lindbeck argued that 'the grammar of religion, like that of language, cannot be explicated or learned by analysis of experience, but only by practice' (2002, p. 189). This focused my professional practice, data analysis and research dialogue on participants' narratives and on performed liturgy, as rich sources from both contemporary and premodern eras. In Chapter 4, I explore glimpses of a 'fusion of horizons' (Gadamer)[87] through interpretation of lived Christian relationships and religious rituals of marriage and blessing. The introduction to my research methodology asserts the significance of my research participants as practitioners who are 'competent speakers of a religious language' (Lindbeck) within the communal context of the Church of England.

Following Lindbeck, that 'the biblical heritage continues to be powerfully present in latent and detextualized forms' (2002, p. 192), a residual influence of Christian practice remains in the Church of England in weddings solemnized by parish clergy in parish churches. Although there has been a major decline in religious weddings, from 85% in 1900 to 23% in 2015,[88]

[87] 'Understanding and interpretation thus always occurs from within a particular 'horizon' that is determined by our historically-determined situatedness … Coming to … an agreement means establishing a common framework or 'horizon' and Gadamer thus takes understanding to be a process of the 'fusion of horizons' (Horizontverschmelzung).' Malpas, J. (2016). Hans-Georg Gadamer. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2016 Edition). In Edward N. Zalta (Ed.). para 3.2. Retrieved from https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/gadamer/

[88] 'The percentage of opposite-sex couples marrying through religious ceremonies has decreased steadily over time. In 1900, religious ceremonies accounted for 85% of all marriages, by 1980 this

Church of England clergy solemnized 18% of all marriages in England in 2015.[89] Lindbeck argued that a cultural-linguistic framework offers primary knowledge on *how to be* religious (which may include beliefs) rather than *knowledge* either *about* religion or about teachings (emphasis added). Lindbeck located the impact of the gospel in lived practice, that 'the proclamation of the gospel…may be first of all the telling of a story, but this gains power and meaning insofar as it is embodied in the total gestalt of community life and action' (1984, p. 36). Although attitudes to religion continue to move away from faith affiliation, Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic approach interpreted why the Christian gospels provide a residual influence on English social values. In 2017 a leading article, commenting on declining church attendance, opined that

> as a nation, our fundamental values regarding concern for those less fortunate than ourselves, honesty in business, the law and so on remain remarkably similar to when church attendance was a matter of routine for almost all. While fewer of us call ourselves Christian, we remain a country steeped in Christian values (The Spectator, 2017).

Particular narratives from the gospels were cited: 'the government's welfare to work programme could have been based on the parable of the talents; much of Jeremy Corbyn's thinking could be drawn from the tale of the Good Samaritan,' concluding 'that is modern Britain's relationship with religion. While shy to admit belief, we continue to exhibit the behaviours of religious people. As Alastair Campbell once said to Tony Blair, 'We don't do God.' Yet our society is as underpinned by faith as it ever was.'[90] In an era when fewer people call themselves Christians, participants in this research who are practitioners have

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had fallen to 50%. Since 1992, civil marriages have increasingly outnumbered religious marriages every year.' Office for National Statistics. (2018, February 28). *Marriages in England and Wales: 2015*. para 6. Retrieved from https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/marriagecohabitationandcivilpartnerships/bulletins/marriagesinenglandandwalesprovisional/2015

[89] Religious ceremonies include the Church of England within England not Wales, so that 43,023 weddings were in Church of England ceremonies in 2015 out of 62,614 religious ceremonies, within a total of 239,020 mixed-sex marriages that year. (Office of National Statistics. (2018). *Religious Marriages by Denomination 2004-2015*. Table 1. Retrieved from https://www.ons.gov.uk/file?uri=/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/marriagecohabitationandcivilpartnerships/adhocs/008310religiousmarriagesinenglandandwales2004to2015/religiousmarriagesbydenomination2004to2015.xls)

[90] (2017, September 9). Religion is on the decline – yet our society is underpinned by faith. *The Spectator*. London, UK. Retrieved from https://www.spectator.co.uk/2017/09/religion-is-on-the-decline-yet-our-society-is-underpinned-by-faith/

particular significance as 'competent speakers' able, I argue, to contribute to bridging the gap between the Church of England and rapid social change.

Building on Lindbeck's assertion, that 'religious change and innovation result from interaction between cultural-linguistic systems with changing situations' (1984, p. 39), my research offers evidence and proposals towards an interpretive scheme, rooted in participants' operant and espoused theologies, in dialogue with research literature. In this third theoretical framework informing my research, Lindbeck's proposal of a dialectical relationship between religion and each particular context of adherents' lives provides an alternative to a unilateral approach, acknowledging that experience within changing social contexts can change the religion (as well as religion, experience). A cultural-linguistic outlook surveys 'human experience shaped and constituted by cultural and linguistic forms' (1984, p. 34) so that in this research, the participants' narratives and the linguistic forms of liturgy are meaningful actions with significance as 'texts' (Ganzevoort, 2012, pp. 215-216), among the literature and rituals of a culture. Hunsinger (2003, p. 47) reframed cultural-linguistic theory as 'the distinctively postliberal option. Where literalism sees the mode of reference for theological language as univocal, and expressivism as equivocal, postliberalism sees it as analogical.' He asserted that postliberal research can recover premodern insights 'that were often eclipsed during modernity by the polarized clash between liberalism and fundamentalism,' leading my research to dialogue with premodern liturgies and rituals in Chapter 4. Gadamer's concept of a 'fusion of horizons'[91] fosters understanding through a research conversation between premodern and contemporary liturgies that, I interpret, resonated with participants' experience (including liturgical practice), informed by literature in the three theoretical frameworks.

Narrative in qualitative research

In the postliberal canonical narrative tradition, Lindbeck, Hans Frei (1993) and Stanley Hauerwas (1997) sought authentic ways of being Christian through living within the biblical sacred 'master narrative,' where particular stories may be located 'within the framework of the story of *God told* through Christ' (Graham, et al., 2007, pp. 151–2, emphasis original). Feminist theologian Heather Walton critiqued an underlying assumption of hierarchy that prioritizes theology over literature, to advocate 'exposing the suppressed relation between literature and theology out of which the very notion of 'biblical narrative' is conceived' (Walton, 2007, p. 40). Warning of the danger in Hauerwas's use of narrative, that 'the

[91] See above, p. 45, footnote 111.

discreteness of the Christian narrative is illusory,' Walton asserted that literary techniques interrogate narrative and, with 'a feminist hermeneutics of suspicion' employed 'the deconstructive feminine principle which undermines the master narrative' (2007, p. 41). This third theoretical framework holds in tension the concept of canonical intratextuality (Lindbeck) in biblical texts, the second theoretical framework's awareness of feminist deconstruction that foregrounds issues of power by recognising culturally-constructed social structures including patriarchal societies, and the first theoretical framework's queer theory and research into gender and sexuality that propose the instability of social and theological labelling and essentialist binary normativity.

Zoë Bennett argued that 'much is gained by moving from the language of 'critique' and 'suspicion' to the language of 'interpretation,' by adopting 'language and processes of comparison and analogy' (2013, p. 49). The 'language' of Christianity developed with biblical scriptures and performed practices from the premodern to contemporary eras, including liturgies, rituals and symbols. Nicola Slee's contemporary poetry, often written for liturgical contexts, is an example of a continuous tradition rooted in scriptural language and poetic techniques, allied to prayer and biblical stories. Noting that British poetry rarely uses a passionate voice, Slee advocated a language of blessing and a revitalisation of religious or liturgical forms to bear and communicate new meanings in the contemporary context (2014, pp. 13–15).

A shift towards plurality of interpretation (Beattie, 2015, p. 33, Bryman, 2016, p. 377, para. 17.1) challenges univocal or competing equivocal truth claims because 'narrative creation usually encourages reflexivity and acknowledges that truth and certainty are unstable' (Bold, 2012, p. 13). Through employing narrative methods (page 52) to interpret co-existent multiple meanings I aimed to enable participants' particular subaltern voices to speak from, and into, their complex lived Christian contexts. Arguing that 'narratives of various kinds help people to construct and understand their social world,' Bold asserted that subjective meaning and emotion are significant 'in making sense of social events and settings, together with the need for reflexivity in that sense making' (2012, p. 13). In the following chapters, participants' stories with affective content convey meanings of living within a religion as evidence of their own reflexivity, by interpreting biblical scriptures in the light of their experience of God's interaction within contemporary lives and practice. As a reflexive practitioner-researcher, I interpreted this interaction between scripture and lived Christian intuitions of the divine as crossings of narrative tracks (Crites, see page 50 below) that resonate among cultural contexts, languages and times, often in liturgies in church. For

Ellis, qualitative researchers aspire 'to tell stories that show bodily, cognitive, emotional and spiritual experience' in 'the interpretive, narrative, autoethnographic project' where the researcher is located within the practice through reflexivity (2004, p. 30). These insights from academic literature inform the design and interpretation of this qualitative research project, building a postliberal cultural-linguistic approach with narrative resources to answer my research question.

Postliberal 'constructive' narrative

Narratives can be constructed in the light of the parabolic quality of Jesus' stories, ministry and, in Luke's gospel, his life itself (Graham, et al., 2005, p. 47), through people telling their life stories for theological reflection. A postliberal analogical approach, termed by Graham, Walton, and Ward 'constructive narrative,' affirms that humans use storytelling to create our world and that God reveals the divine through stories.[92] Theological reflection on the relationship between our own narratives and 'the narrative of God' is thus 'the creative interweaving of many strands of human experience and sacred tradition into exciting new configurations' (Graham, et al., 2007, p. 89). This possibility of dynamic, life-giving interaction between human stories and the Church's traditional scriptures informs my research into participants' lived faith, focused on rites of passage performed in rituals of marriage and blessing of union. However, religious stories can cease to hold meaning when the creative, dynamic interweaving of narratives ceases:

> It is within these living narrative forms that ancient religious convictions maintain their vitality and authenticity. If they are not able to be reborn in the life narratives of believers then they have relinquished the power to transform lives and can no longer retain their sacred status (2007, p. 89).

This research warns of the impact of the Church of England's prohibition of liturgies of blessing for couples in same-sex unions, that although these 'life narratives of believers' exist (in participants' operant and espoused theologies of union in this research), they are not included by the Church. In Chapter 4 I argue that by using its power to withhold God's blessing, the Church damages the life and mission of its worshipping community by the exclusion of adherents from marriage and blessing that jeopardizes the sacred status of the 'living narrative forms.' This is significant, according to Stephen Crites, because stories 'shape in the most profound way the inner story of experience' as we gain meaning from

[92] Including parables, a form of analogy.

the stories we hear, including the hidden sacred stories and symbols of a given culture. Crites identified that changing experiences of human living can lead people to feel that 'old stories have a hollow ring' because they no longer resonate with their own contemporary stories. However, he proposed that recognition of 'a hollow ring' can stimulate originality, a spur for this research project (Crites, in Graham, et al., 2007, p. 105). In Chapter 4 I argue that the growing gulf in stories about marriage and partnership – between practice by participants in the Church of England and official normative theology – has potential through this research to become a catalyst for significant change in theologies of union before God, blessed by God, through a priest, in Church.

Crites described three narrative dimensions that together act in 'tensed unity,'[93] 'the sacred story, mundane stories, and the temporal form of experience itself.' This 'narrative quality of experience' identifies the power released when

> sometimes the tracks cross, causing a burst of light like a comet entering our atmosphere. Such a luminous moment, in which sacred, mundane and personal are inseparably conjoined, we call *symbolic* in a special sense (in Graham, et al., 2007, p. 107, emphasis original).

In my parish practice and in participant's narratives interpreted in the following chapters, such powerful luminous moments occur, with recognition of love and of the presence of the divine, often through liturgies in church. The power of symbolic objects within such liturgies comes from meanings given by the stories told about them:

> the shock of its appearance is like the recurrence in daylight of an episode recalled from dreams. For a religious symbol becomes fully alive to consciousness when sacred story dramatically intersects both an explicit narrative and the course of a man's [sic] personal experience. The symbol is precisely that double intersection (2007, p. 107).

I argue that when sacred religious symbols and liturgies may not be used or performed in the traditional sacred space of churches, denied to same-sex couples on the basis of their gender and sexuality, the profound 'double intersection' of religious symbols within Crites' three tracks is actively prohibited by the Church of England. This powerful exclusion has a deeply negative impact of absence, I argue: an intentionally-constructed vacuum of

[93] Of past, present and future. (Crites, in Graham, et al., 2007, p. 102, citing Augustine, *Confessions,* XI: xx.)

prohibition that impacts on the whole Church and society: on couples, clergy, families, guests, congregations and their communities – even their nation. I argue that the Church's use of power to prohibit blessing and a liturgy for same-sex couples creates an 'abyss of speechlessness' for 'those who are voiceless and invisible,'[94] intersecting with my second theological framework of human rights and liberation theologies, but primarily critiqued through intratextuality because the exclusion is experienced by couples and their clergy as inconsistent with the sacred texts of the Christian faith. Participants refer to the immanent meanings within the gospels of Jesus of Nazareth's inclusive welcome of outsiders in his own religious cultural context, and the apostle Paul's theology of Christians as a new creation in Christ (2 Corinthians 5.17), incorporated through faith and baptism (1 Corinthians 12.12-13) where boundaries of social labels and exclusions are transcended (Galatians 3.26-29).

Contemporary liturgies with rituals, language and poetry (Slee, 2014, p. 13) continue to express stories of human relationships, reflecting God's love, likeness and covenant (John, 2012, p. 4). Liturgies, both premodern and contemporary, comprise narratives from biblical scriptures as part of sacred rituals of word, symbol and action to celebrate rites of passage and community formation in the presence of God. Liturgies of marriage and blessing survive from premodern manuscript sacramentaries for both mixed- and same-sex couples, celebrated in church ceremonies with a priest officiating (Boswell, 1995). Gadamer's concept of a fusion of horizons, experienced in my professional practice and interpreted in this research, underlies my affirmation that Christian liturgies using religious symbols continue to resonate through times, contexts and languages in worship. Such liturgies performing a sacred ritual have been understood as sacraments: the inspirational crossing of Crites' three narrative tracks. The gathered people celebrate intuitions of the divine, present through Christ in Spirit, indwelling participants' faith and lived human experience, through performing rituals in sacred places, assisted by clergy. In Chapter 4, I explore rituals of premodern and current liturgies to recover and renew meanings for marriage and blessings for contemporary practice, to challenge the vacuum of prohibition by the Church, and to enable rich, vibrant, powerful stories of loving union with God's blessing to be expressed and performed.

[94] See above, p. 41. Footnotes 99 and 100.

Research methodology & methods

Introduction

My methodology of practical theology in this research was integrative, weaving together issues from ministry, lived practice (discipleship) and formal research (formation), informed by insights from person-centred pastoral theologies and practices of care (Miller-McLemore, 2012, p. 6). My postliberal, cultural-linguistic research enquiry was located within the religious communal context of the Church of England, where doctrines are analogous to the depth grammar of a language learnt, shared and embodied by adherents (Lindbeck, 1984, 2002). The communal life and language of the Church is formed and reformed by its scriptures and rituals, handed down in texts, liturgies and songs that accrete symbolic meanings in sacred places on particular occasions through lived and shared experience. Meanings deepen and enrich in diversity (analogous to local, regional and national dialects) through the changing social and cultural contexts over time.[95] These meanings may be lost (Graham, et al., 2007, p. 89, Crites, 1971, in Graham, et al., 2007, p. 105) but may also be rediscovered through renewed interest in premodern sources (Miller-McLemore, 2012, p.3), including the liturgies and rituals in Chapter 4 in this research.

Lindbeck (in 2004) asserted that although the scriptures, as inscribed texts, do not change, 'changes in landscape and worldviews occur within believers' scripture-dependent outlook.' Debate and discernment of 'newly-encountered realities require self-critical reordering and reform of beliefs and practices' to be consonant, he argued, with 'God's vision of the whole, which embraces all times and places.' Lindbeck reaffirmed the Church's normative view of the biblical scriptures for the Christian community as 'the textually mediated light of what is, for the community, the [God's] unsurpassable vision of the whole' (2009, [2004], p. 135). Lindbeck argued that 'the task of ascertaining which of the changing forms is faithful to the putatively abiding substance' is from adherents of the faith 'who have effectively interiorized a religion. They know by connaturality… whether specific usages are in

[95] The Christian Church has gathered clergy and theologians regularly in Synods from the 4th century (including bishops from the British Isles) to discern a consensus on the breadth of variation consonant with the Gospels. Walton (2007) alerted to the patriarchal cultural context of these gatherings and critiques a 'master narrative,' where voices from marginalized groups may be unheard (Ganzevoort, 2012).
The Western and Eastern Churches parted communion in 1054 and the Protestant reformation parted from Roman Catholicism in the West in the 16th century.
The Church of England broke with Rome in 1533, with a settlement that was both 'catholic and reformed.' ((n. d.). *History of the Church of England*. Retrieved from https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/church-england-glance/history-church-england)

conformity to the spirit, the interior rule of faith' rather than needing 'the clumsy directives of official dogma.' In addition to reflective practitioners and adherents, Linkbeck noted that the contribution of 'theoreticians' to aid religious communities was useful 'if they can show how doctrines can be both firm and flexible, both abiding and adaptable' (2009, p. 65). My methodology recruited participants in this research as practitioners of the faith 'who have effectively interiorized a religion,' and are able to narrate 'the faithful practices of faithful Christian people [who are] themselves bearers of theology' (Cameron, et al., 2010, p. 51). Through this research, I argue, participants can contribute to the Church's task of ascertaining faithfulness to the Christian 'abiding substance' in the changing social context of marriage and partnerships.

My postliberal approach provided a cultural-linguistic lens that resonates with Crites's expression of the narrative quality of experience as three tracks of stories. These stories – that convey nuanced qualities of the sacred (divine), mundane (human), and everyday (personal experience) – cross and interact through human lives, personally and in the community's rituals (Crites, 1971, in Graham, et al., 2007, p. 107). Biblical scriptures (Lindbeck, 2002, p. 180-182, 2009, p. 135) and liturgies (premodern and contemporary) have a narrative quality as *sacred* for the community, and as *mundane* when they are performed interacting with human stories, in *everyday personal* temporal particularity. Through stories, this layered, overlapping and intersecting narrative quality of experience (Crites, 1971) offers glimpses of transformative encounters between divine and human, in Christianity brought into fruition in and through Jesus Christ.

This creates a hermeneutic key for my interpretation of liturgies (contemporary and premodern), participants' narratives, and their references to biblical scriptures (Ganzevoort, 2012, pp. 221-222). My participants, nine of whom were parish clergy in reflective practice, including presidency of performed liturgies, (whilst three were lay people who worshipped regularly), were fluent, 'competent speakers of [the] religious language' (Lindbeck, 2002, p. 173). I argue that their contributions to this research therefore offer contextual evidence of 'luminous moments' when 'the tracks cross' in a 'double intersection' (Crites, 1971, in Graham, et al., 2007, p. 107) between their contemporary Christian lived responses and the biblical narrative of God's creating love, in Christ, through the Spirit.

My methodology recognised the possibility that 'critical contributions from subaltern voices challenge the narrative hegemony of dominant groups and their interpretation of the

religious tradition by offering the stories of personal experiences' (Ganzevoort, 2012, p. 214) so that my research was, therefore, conducted in strict confidentiality. Practical theology with a narrative approach is a methodology that 'empowers marginalized voices by creating an audience for [participants'] stories' and recognises that practices and stories are performative rather than representative (2012, pp. 214, 217, 221). The rich and varied meanings of participants' reflective narratives – from their lived responses to the Christian scriptures within the Church – are interpreted in this research as time-, place-, and relation-specific (Ganzevoort, 2012, p. 220) co-constructed narratives interacting among the three narrative tracks (Crites, 1971) of Christian communal life.

Insights from the poetics of practice, and of testimony (Walton, 2012, pp. 177-181), informed my narrative interpretation and representative constructions of participants' co-constructed narratives, because this research addressed 'aspects of human life that cannot be addressed at all within our usual registers and are currently "unspeakable"' (Walton, 2012, p. 180). My methodology adopts 'a narrative analysis of practices [that] can – and should – uncover the hidden normativity within these practices and in relation to the tradition in which they are embedded.' This accepts and values the subjectivity of human stories and places them in dialogue with biblical stories raised by participants and in premodern liturgies (Ganzevoort, 2012, p. 222), within the cultural-linguistic communal context of Christian religion through time, researched in the contemporary Church of England.

Methodology and methods

The inductive methodology I designed[96] to address my research question (Kumar, 2011; Mason, 2002) explored how participants' relationships were constituted and might work (2002, p. 173). As a practitioner-researcher conducting research with participants through the academy, my 'Type 2' collaborative knowledge production (Lee, 2009, p. 142) generated insights into meanings of equal marriage with explanations and arguments to understand my research field. By linking three theoretical frameworks, the methodology was transdisciplinary, looking for bridges between sources of knowledge and different people (Lee, 2009, pp. 137-142). I recognised the significance of maintaining disciplinary conventions for qualitative research methodology so that an interdisciplinary approach – working with formal voices among three theoretical frameworks – could explore tensions

[96]Research Proposal. Portfolio.

between apparently conflicting discourses between participants and the Church's normative theology (Walton, 2007, p. 24).

In the sensitive topic area of human relationships, my qualitative research tailor-made each in-depth interview within the participant's situation (Mason, 2002, p. 64). Data for analysis was detailed, context-specific, trustworthy and authentic, to achieve four indicators of trustworthiness in qualitative study: credibility (the confidence of the participants), transferability (accurate description of the process for others to follow), dependability (detailed record keeping to facilitate the possibility of replication) and confirmability (the possibility of others following the process to compare future research) (Kumar, 2011, pp. 184–185). I incorporated 'legitimacy [that] emerges from the response of the reader' (Czarniawaska, in Bold, 2002, p. 146) through narrative approaches to research reporting: co-constructed narratives and representative constructions (see below, pages 66, 69, 112).

My interpretivist epistemology was an ethnographic approach of interview and listening, where understandings of the social world can be known through participants' first-hand interpretations of their relationships and practices (Bryman, 2016, p. 375) in their social settings (Mason, 2002, p. 55). Interactive talk was a legitimate way to generate data (2002, p. 63) where participants' ethnographies were the primary data source of their understandings and meanings (2002, p. 56). My constructionist ontology recognised that rather than an external phenomenon to investigate, the interactions between people themselves provided social outcomes (Bryman, 2016, p. 375). As an insider (Mason, 2002, p. 56) in professional practice and marriage, I maintained an open approach to participants with awareness of my autoethnographic stance through reflexive practice (Taylor & Hicks, 2009, p. 65). Participants were invited[97] to be 'co-researchers' (Mason, 2002, p. 55) to co-construct narrative data for analysis and interpretation.

Early in my field work I recognised that an emphasis on reflexivity, where the role of the qualitative researcher impacts on both the process and the outcomes of the research, leads to *multiple* 'findings … viewed as versions of an external reality' (Bryman, 2016, p. 377). Through reflexive reading of my transcripts (Mason, 2002, p. 149), reflexive practice undergirded the process of contextual data organisation, coding decisions, tracking and recording steps during the research, as well as retrieving data (Mason, 2002, p. 168).

[97] Appendix 1.

Sampling

My theoretical, purposive snowball sampling began with known contacts due to the sensitivity of the area of research, requiring trust to achieve a study group.[98] Snowball sampling, an organic (flexible and growing) process, generated data and explanations through inductive reasoning (Kumar, 2010, pp. 127, 137, 142). I was aware that the interviewer's relationship with the interviewees recruited was 'constitutive for the narrative data gathered' (Ganzevoort, 2012, p. 220). I adopted the practice of attentive listening during interviews that is non-directive (Rogers, 1986) with intentional reflexivity through journaling.

The first seven participants agreed readily (all clergy), followed by two recommendations of further clergy. To widen the sample, I recruited three lay people by building trust over a long period, and a final clergy participant, to attain maximum diversity in a matrix of gender and sexuality. Intentionally, I rejected stereotypical labels to recruit people but sampled through the Participant Information Sheet[99] until there seemed to be a balance of ethnographies across gender, sexuality and relationship (Figure 1).

Civil marriage ceremonies for same-sex couples commenced as I planned fieldwork. No participants had married or converted their civil partnership to marriage. Four participants had taken part in the Church of England's General Synod proceedings, from four dioceses.

Participants were ordained or lay members of the Church of England, in committed relationships of marriage or civil partnership for ten years, who aspired to equality in their relationship and agreed to co-research equal marriage in the Church through interview. Three participants did not fulfil my research criteria in some respects: two were considering legal unions but had delayed for particular pastoral reasons. I decided to include their interviews in my data set. One further interview was not transcribed because the participant's relationship ended. For the twelve research participants in the data set, two were in (different) couples where one person had transitioned in gender. This diversity within my research sample and data informed my data analysis, theological reflection and interpretation. I decided not to quote from these two interviews, to ensure the participants' anonymity.

[98] Ethics Approval. Portfolio.
[99] Appendix 1.

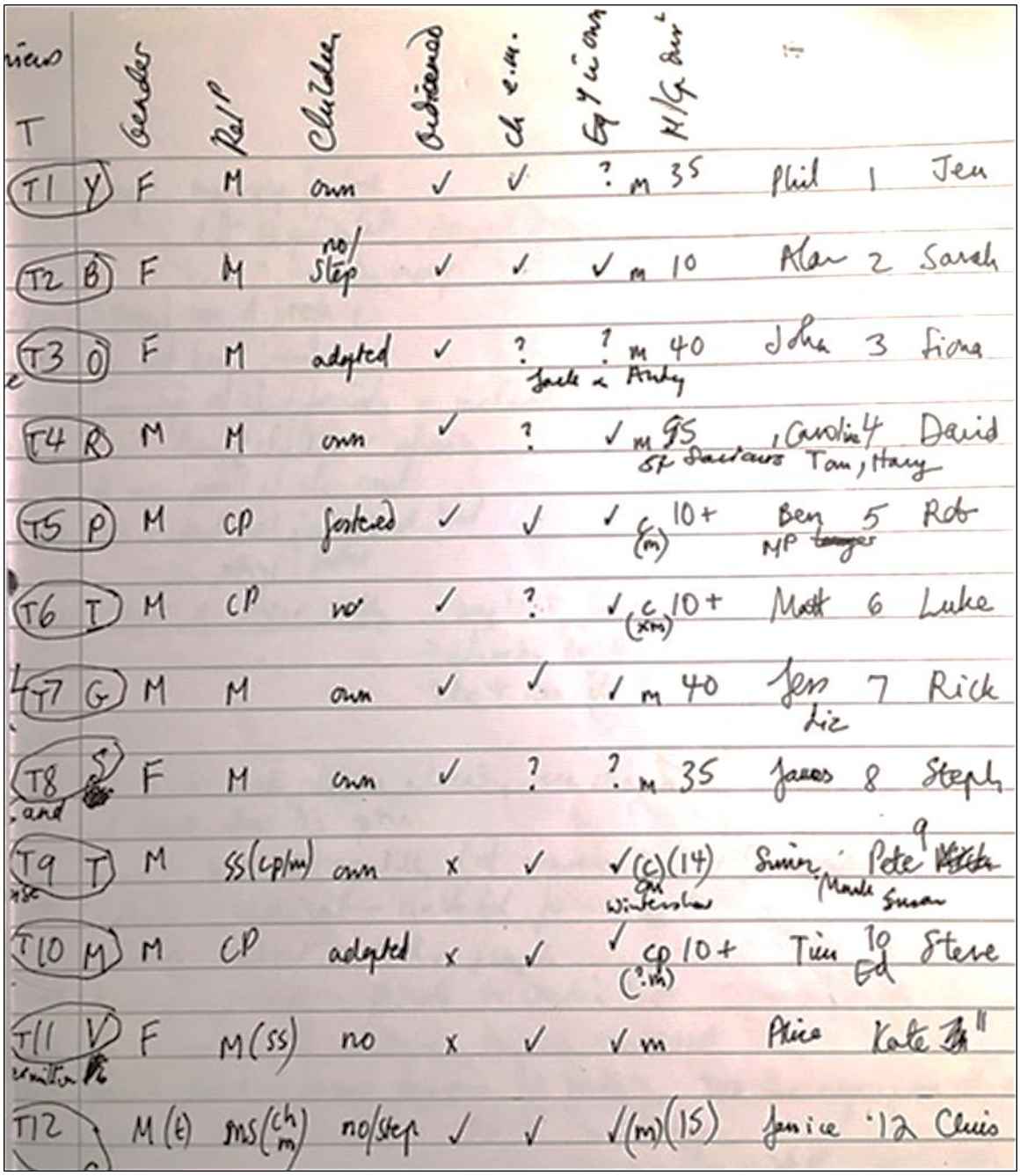

Figure 1. Table showing tracking of diversity in my research sample.

Research methods

Over a period of two years from late January 2015, I conducted 13 semi-structured, face-to-face, in-depth interviews to research understanding of participants' perspectives (Kumar, 2011, p. 160), with an interview guide (Kumar, 2011, p. 162) and open questions used in a flexible order (Mason, 2002, pp. 69–72). The guide (piloted beforehand) evolved during the interview phase with participants' additional themes and issues included in an open process (Atkinson, 1998). One participant requested questions before interview.

Data analysis

I adopted interpretive reading 'through' or 'beyond' interview transcripts to generate meanings from narratives, but not necessarily present in the text (Mason, 2002, p. 149). Sorting data reduced it to a manageable level (Spencer, Ritchie & O'Connor, 2003, p. 214), accompanied by analytical memos to track and justify the significance of emerging themes (Bryman, 2012, p. 587). The stages of data analysis, detailed in the remainder of this chapter, were: indexing, First Cycle Coding, initial categorisation of the data, re-categorisation of the codes, Themeing the Data, Second Cycle Coding (use of capitals original) and the identification of the main categories of data to answer my research question.

Indexing

I considered First Cycle Descriptive Coding, to locate the basic topic of the data (Tesch, in Saldaña, 2013, p. 88). However, because of the rich complexity of participants' narratives, I was not ready to code 'content that has already been more precisely defined and labelled.' I adopted labelling, or tagging, data as a process of indexing before coding (Ritchie, Spencer & O'Connor, 2003, p. 224). Whereas the Church's traditional theology of marriage was clearly defined, the nuanced and detailed content of my data required sustained engagement through analysis with interpretation to discern participants' meanings. Walton identifies the strategic use of 'women's experience' in early feminist theology 'to fracture the monological discourse of theology and create a legitimate ground from which to speak a new word' (2007, pp. 5–6). Reflexivity and journaling brought my experience as an ordained practitioner-researcher in practical theology (married and a parent) into the interpretive data analysis process, to create such a ground by deconstructing and fracturing the Church's 'monological discourse.'

Using my interview prompts as topics, I indexed the transcripts to sort the data by splitting into ten headings, followed by further subdivision for four of the initial headings to fracture the data into detailed sub-indices. In this stage I complexified my interpretations of the research area to reveal sources of difference and conflicts experienced by participants. The indices enabled me to find references by heading and topic (Figure 2) and established 'building blocks' for interpretive coding to demonstrate 'the 'validity' or 'credibility' of the findings' (Spencer et al., 2003, p. 216). Next, I moved from data management to interpreting the meanings through coding and explanatory accounts (2003, p. 215), prior to synthesising and interpreting the evidence (2003, p. 213).

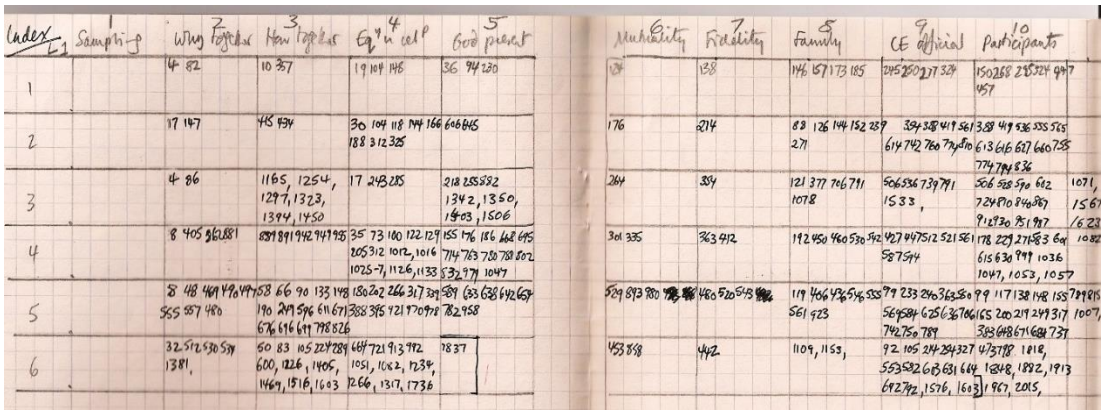

Figure 2. First level indexing table for six transcripts (left column) with topic headings across the top. Transcript line numbers are recorded against each transcript and topic.

First Cycle Coding and interpreting the data

I decided to fracture further the detailed data within participants' narratives through coding (Strauss and Corbin, in Saldaña, 2013, p. 218), as steps before I could identify themes, rather than use thematic analysis (Ritchie et al., 2003, p. 221; Bryman, 2016, p. 584). I wrote analytic memos and generated codes throughout a reflexive process (Mason, 2002, p. 5), splitting the data so that I could interpret complex and deeper meanings (Saldaña, 2013, p. 23) and also reflect on my own location in the analysis. The codes themselves acted as symbols to denote attributes within the narrative that I could link to discern patterns, synthesise categories and build theories (2013, p. 4). Reflexive writing in analytic memos explored multiple threads within each participant's data and between participants' narratives, gradually focusing through reflection and interrogating the process (2013, p. 50).

I chose Versus Coding to reveal sources of conflict within my data set, observing actual conflicts with other humans and their attitudes identified in the transcripts (Saldaña 2013, p. 117) with awareness that conflicts are rarely about abstract concepts or principles but about different experiences (Boal, in Saldaña, 2013, p. 117). Two mutually-exclusive ways of being or thinking can divide a group, termed a 'moiety' (Wolcott, in Saldaña, 2013, p. 115), leading me to choose dichotomous paired terms for Versus Coding. I analysed conflict between people within their settings to reveal power differences, for practitioners 'an important diagnostic for initiating and facilitating positive social change' (Saldaña, 2013, p. 116). By finding patterns to reveal power imbalances and uses of power that impacted on my participants, Versus Coding could identify injustice (Agar, in Saldaña, 2013, p. 116) and

signpost my research towards changes to redress problems. During First Cycle Coding, I interpreted strong experiences of injustice with imbalances of power evident in my data.

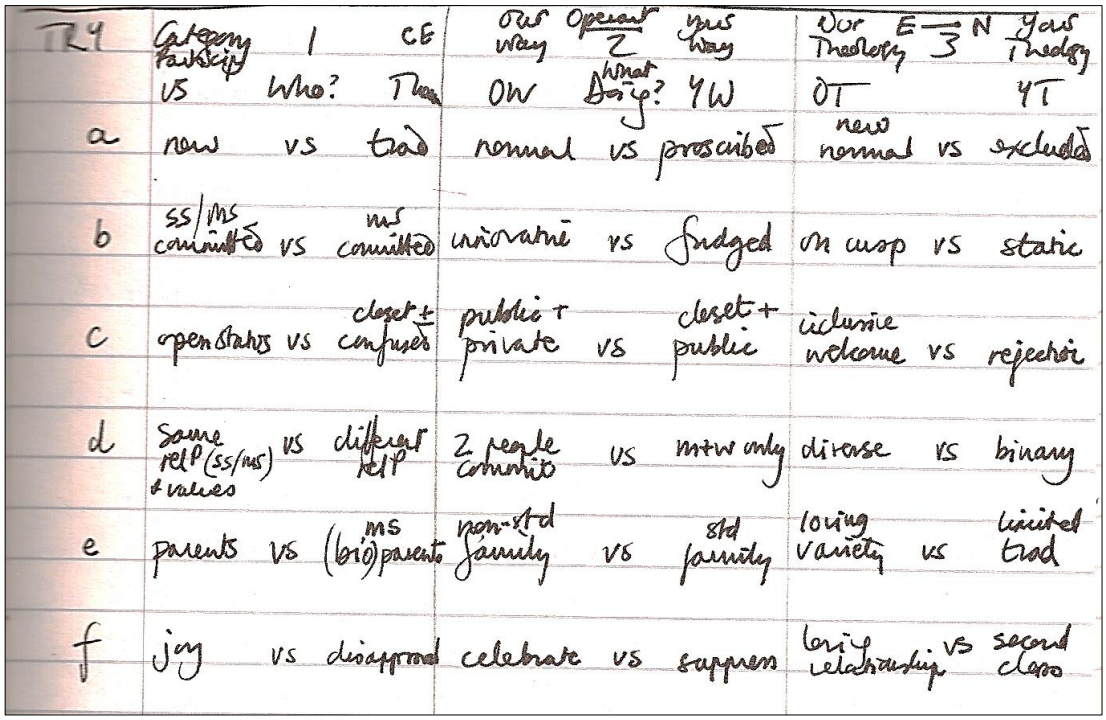

Figure 3. Analytic memo with three sets of Versus Coding pairs, in a preliminary coding table.

The process of Versus Coding revealed mutually-exclusive moieties in three areas: 'the primary stakeholders; how each side perceives and acts towards the conflict; and the central issue at stake;' with the last as a possible key theme (Saldaña, 2013, p. 117). I related the first of these moieties to *my participants* ***Versus*** *the normative Church of England*, and the second, to each group's attitudes and behaviour. This developed (Figure 3) in my analytic memos as **Us** (my participants, Christians within the Church of England who were open to equal marriage) **Versus Them** (Christians within the Church of England who conformed to a traditional view of marriage), and **Our Way** (how the participants lived) **Versus Your Way** (how the Church of England's teaching requires members to live). The third moiety emerged gradually from the research to be the *varied espoused theologies of participants* and *those of the normative Church*. This was expressed as **Our Theology** (emerging theologies of marriage from my participants) **Versus Your Theology** (the traditional teachings and practices of the Church of England on marriage). The third moiety evolved through the data analysis process, and became the source of my key themes.

Through Versus Coding I identified multiple ways of behaving and diverse attitudes co-existent within the Church of England, with more than two opposing points of view about a range of issues. In particular, the third moiety revealed a wide range of fledgling espoused

theologies from participants, not a single theology of equal marriage in opposition to the Church's traditional teaching. This moiety became a conceptual category to elucidate the theologies I was teasing out from my data, revealing that 'there are not 'two sides' but rather *N* sides or multiple perspectives in any discourse' (Clarke, in Saldaña, 2013, p.118).

Initial categorisation of codes and voices of theology

The three mutually-exclusive moieties resonated with the 'four voices of theology,' operant, espoused, formal and normative (Cameron et al., 2010). Operant voices express who people are and how they live in practice, whilst espoused voices describe what people believe about their identity and lifestyle. Formal voices include practitioners and researchers who adopt reflective and academic disciplines to ask questions seeking understanding of people's theologies, to foster dialogue and change. Normative voices of theology are an institution's agreed official teaching, rules, laws and liturgies that express the mainstream theology of the time.

I interpreted the first two sets of opposing pairs (moieties) as operant theologies and the third set of pairs as espoused theologies. The third set showed that participants' espoused theologies also included normative theologies, when the Church's official teaching was espoused by participants at the same time they were raising questions and reinterpreting anew (Chapters 2 and 3). This research project offers a formal theological voice to engage with operant, espoused and normative-espoused voices, recognising that in the third moiety of my data there is a *range of espoused* theologies within *each code* of the pair (Our Theology and Your Theology), with blurring, diversity and a continuum (or multi-dimensional matrix) of theological reflection and teaching rather than binary, mutual exclusion. The 'four voices of theology' themselves (and the concept of Versus Codes as *mutually-exclusive* moieties) are thus fractured through this analysis to reveal deep, conflicting complexity among people in human relationships relating to the divine through nuanced theologies. Rather than adversarial or separated operant and espoused voices, I interpreted many of my participants' theologies as *within* the Church's normative theology albeit evolving and experienced as contested. However, the Church of England's normative theologies are sustained by institutional power and the exercise of discipline to ensure conformity: 'Versus Coding makes evident the power issues at hand as humans often *perceive* them – as binaries or dichotomies' (Saldaña, 2013, p. 118, emphasis added).

Coding transcripts

I used IN VIVO words as code words for Versus Coding where relevant, to locate participants' feelings and attitudes in their own terms. I chose Transcript 5 as the initial source of Versus codes because this research participant had expressed clearly and in detail considerable theological reflection on their own identity, lifestyle and attitudes. I was aware that additional code pairs would be required to capture the diversity of my participants' experience and attitudes in their differing contexts.

Coding (six transcripts) 1.3.17 GK Henwood (updated 13.4.17 adding g and h – in red)

Versus Coding	Category 1: Who?		Cat 2: What Doing? (Operant x 2)		Cat 3: Why? Espoused vs Normative	
(Ritchie/Lewis)	Descriptive		Descriptive		Explanatory	
	US versus	THEM	Our Way versus	Your Way	Our Theology vs	Your Theology
	i	ii	i	ii	i	ii
a	New	Traditional	Normal	Proscribed	New normal	Excluded
b	SS/MS committed	MS only	Innovative	Fudged	On cusp	Static
c	Open status	Closet or confused	Public + private	Closet + public	Inclusive welcome	Rejection
d	SS/MS rel'p same values	Different relationships	2 people committing	MS only	Diverse	Binary
e	Parents	MS (bio) parents only	Non-standard family	Standard family	Loving variety	Limited to tradition
f	Joy	Disapproval	Celebrate	Suppress	Loving relationp	Second class
g	equals	complementary	Equal roles	Different roles	Gender constructionist	Gender essentialist
h	not children	assumes children	Choice re children	Confusion re children	Child-free acceptable	Consummation/ conception

SS same sex
MS mixed sex

Figure 4. Versus Coding table to fracture the data. For example, 3ai would be *'New normal.'*

The table of Versus code pairs (Figure 4) using some IN VIVO code words had three pairs across the top (six codes, with numbers for reference) and six reference letters down the left, creating a coding matrix of 36 codes. Two further reference letters generated 12 more codes, to code data from later transcripts where participants' patterns of relationship differed. This table of 48 matrix reference numbers and letters was a 'look-up table' (Figure 4) to code each transcript (Figure 5) with precise codes to interpret and fracture the data. I recorded transcript line numbers to locate occurrences of topics by their Versus codes (Figure 6). I coded the data using all three moieties for the first six transcripts (48 codes: 1ai-3hii), but for the next three transcripts focused on particular themes by coding only the third moiety (16 codes: 3a1-hii), to identify espoused theologies for interpretation and synthesis. I could return to code or refer to operant theologies in the first two moieties later if necessary, using the full indices of the location of topics in the transcripts.

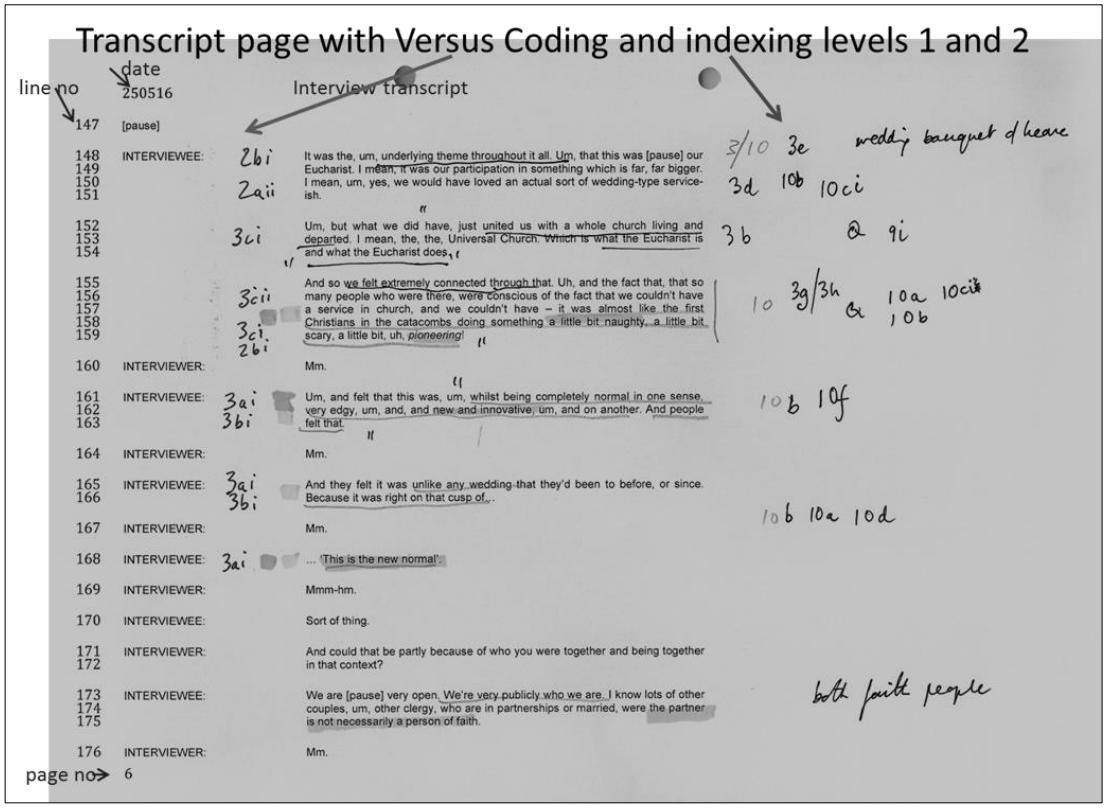

Figure 5. Slide of a transcript page: Versus codes (left) and indices (levels 1 and 2) (right).

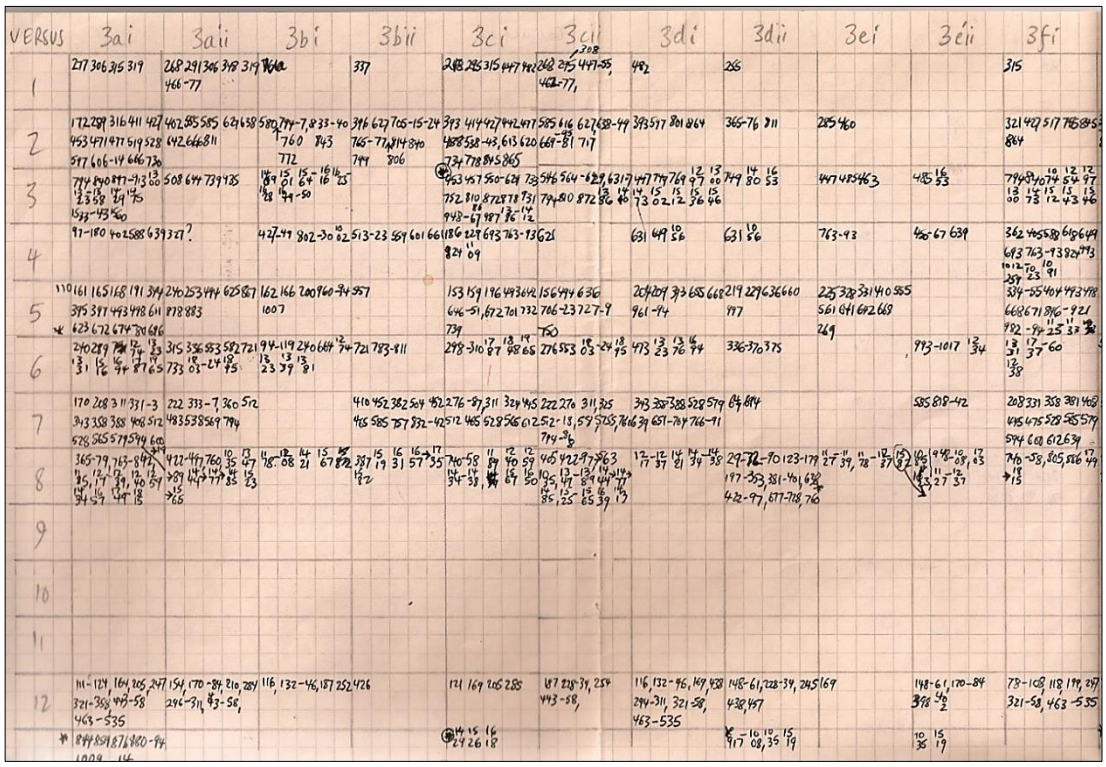

Figure 6. Table recording transcript line numbers for Versus codes, Category 3a-fi (top line).

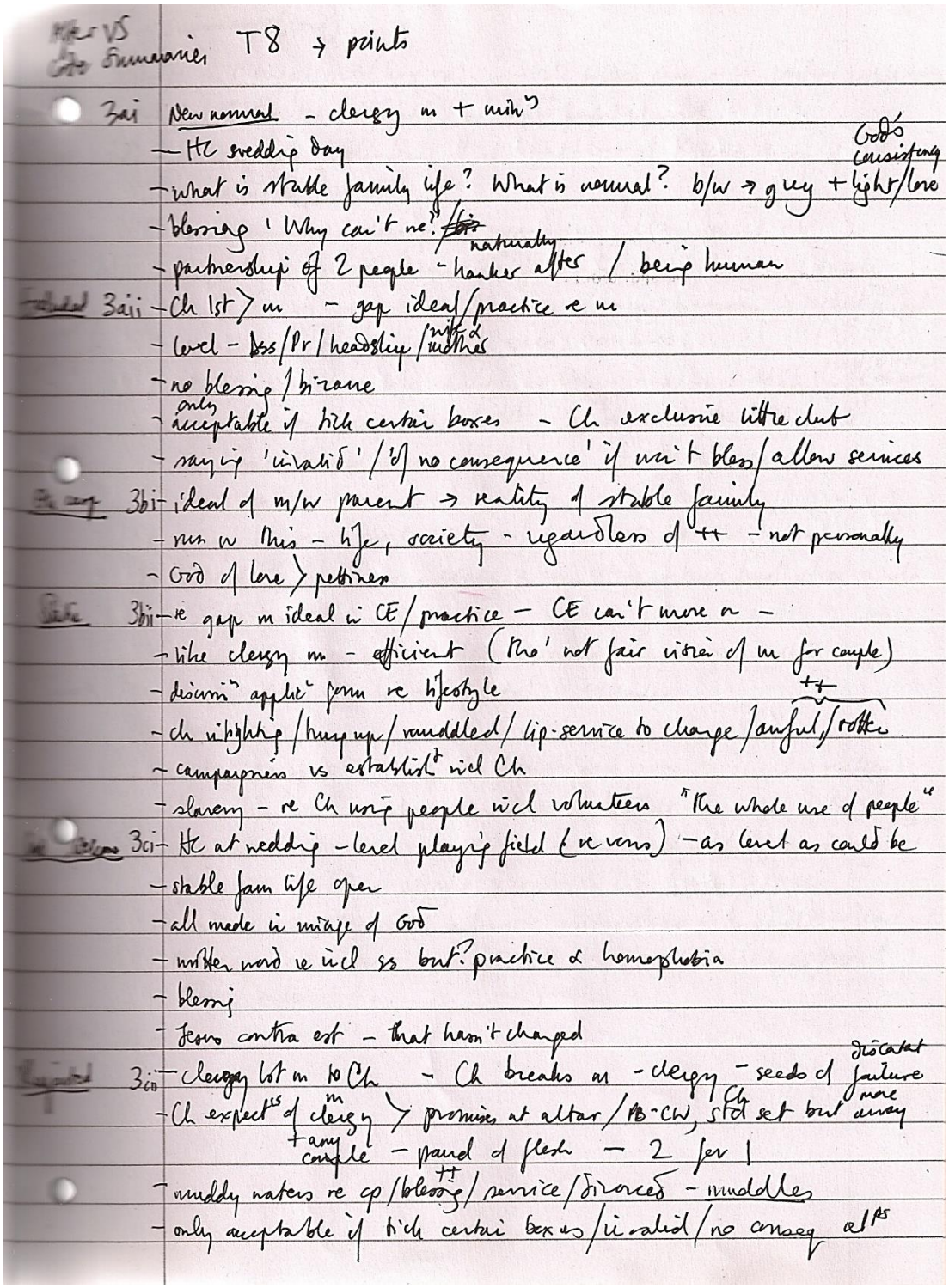

Figure 7. Analytic memo with espoused theologies coded in Category 3 (transcript 8).

After First Cycle Versus Coding, I recorded references and words of key statements, narratives and quotations for each transcript in the eight areas of my participants' emerging espoused theologies (Figure 7). Analytic memos summarised these before I re-categorized the codes (Saldaña, 2013, p. 198) to create a list of 111 statements of emerging espoused theologies across the data set. This step, 'analysing portions of data with an

extended thematic statement rather than a shorter code' is 'Themeing the Data' (Saldaña, 2013, pp. 175–6, spelling original) to focus on key themes and develop either an 'overarching' theme or an 'integrative' weaving of several themes into a narrative. I grouped 22 sub-themes, re-categorizing and reducing duplication to seek the 'essential' rather than the 'incidental' characteristics of the social reality being researched (Van Manen, in Saldaña, 2013, p. 176). In analytic memos I grouped the statements into five key categories of theologies: ministry; the impact of the Church of England's teaching on participants; human identity; human relationships; and practice. These categories emerged through a thematic analysis 'that is just as intensive as coding and requires comparable reflection on participant meanings and outcomes' (Saldaña, 2013, p. 177). At this stage I selected two categories that formed the twin integrative themes to engage with the research question: espoused theologies of human identity; and of human relationships. The remaining three categories supported the twin integrative themes with evidence from operant theologies.

Synthesising and Second Cycle Coding

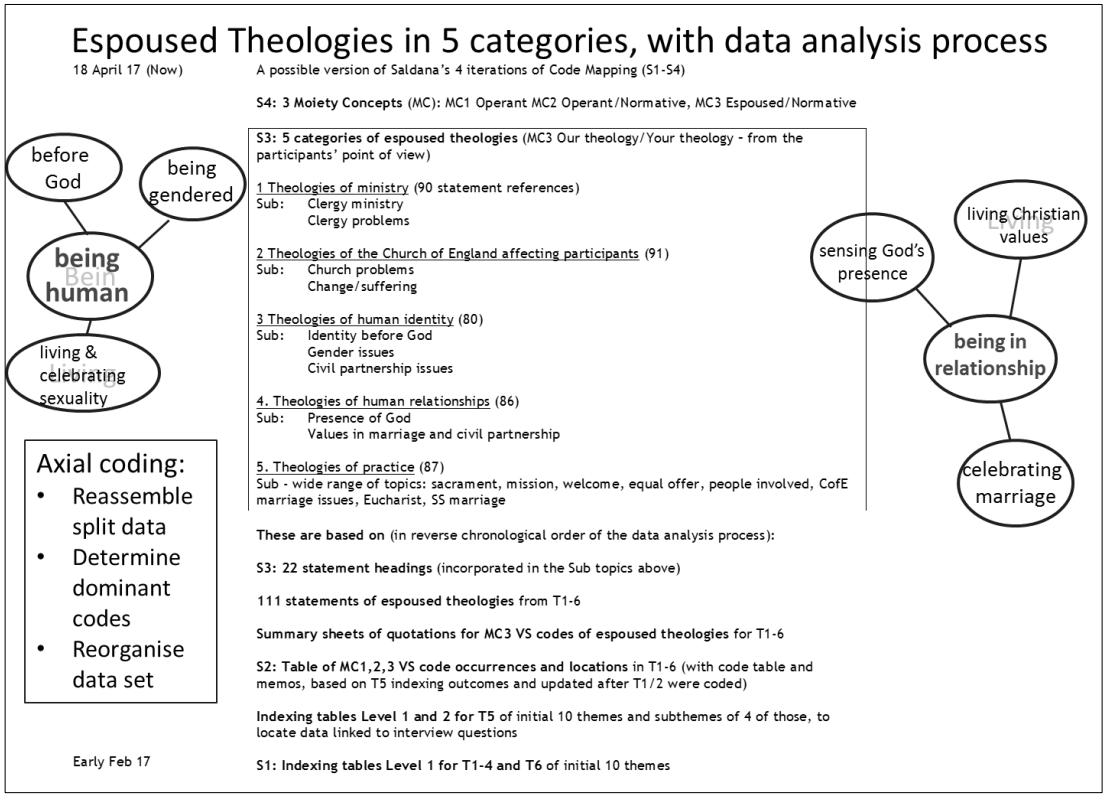

Figure 8. Code Mapping, Themeing the Data, Second Cycle Coding and new categories.

After my research data was 'split' or 'fractured' through Versus Coding, in the Second Cycle with Axial Coding I aimed to synthesize the codes into dominant and supporting categories,

so that the data set would be reorganised (Boeije, in Saldaña, 2013, p. 218). The first of the two dominant categories of data (Figure 8) was 'theologies of human identity' with a central Axial code, 'being human,' and three Axial sub-codes: being human before God; being gendered; and living and celebrating sexuality. The second dominant category, 'theologies of human relationships,' had a central Axial code, 'being in relationship,' with three sub-codes: sensing God's presence; living Christian values; and celebrating marriage. The two central Axial codes are a Second Cycle Coding of the two categories I selected from the five categories that emerged through Themeing the Data. They continued as categories, with new names as I began to synthesize the coded data, using a method that 'relates categories to subcategories and specifies the properties and dimensions of a category' (Charmaz, in Saldaña, 2013, p.218). Second Cycle Axial Coding enabled me to determine the dominant categories with their codes and their subsidiary sets of data, to reorder the data set into conceptual categories for interpretation of co-constructed narratives and generation of representative constructions to express emerging theologies (Chapters 2 and 3).

Co-constructed narrative and representative constructions

Based on the literature in my third theoretical framework (narrative approaches in qualitative research), I adopted 'constructive' narrative approaches (Graham et al., 2007) to interpret research data and represent voices. Bold's 'constructive interpretivism' provided an approach to tease out meanings from the stories told by my research participants, allied to ethnographic researchers' interpretivist paradigm (Gephart, in Bold, 2012, p. 13). In Chapters 2 and 3 I adopted an 'experience-centred approach to narrative' where 'co-constructed narratives' may be generated between a researcher and participant (Andrews et al., in Bold, 2012, p. 22) in a 'co-coordination of story development' (Squire, 2008, in Bold, 2012, p. 23). This approach continued by including the audience or reader who shapes a narrative with their own individual interpretation, so that it becomes multilevel in meaning (Andrews et al., ibid). The interaction between storyteller and listener, where both (and all who listen or read) may experience a sense of transformation, can lead to change in practice because 'all participants may have their lives changed in some way by the shared experience' (Bold, 2012, p. 23). My use of co-constructed narrative followed Czarniawaska to include the reader's response to a narrative as a measure of legitimacy and credibility, where attributes of trustworthiness, plausibility and criticality resonate with their own experience (in Bold, 2012, p. 146).

Proposing a reconceptualisation of validity, reliability and replicability by the comparison of narratives with readers' own sense of lived reality, Bold developed 'fictional narratives' that evolved into representative constructions in research reporting (2012, pp. 145-146). I adopt representative constructions for my research participants, respecting their stories (Bold, 2012, p. 147) and retaining their voices whilst ensuring compatibility with the ethical framework for this research. However, to achieve anonymity I did not find it necessary to rewrite my co-constructed narratives but expressed extracts in representative constructions through formatting and punctuation, so that in this research they are not 'fictional' (Bold, 2012, 146) but rather a form of co-constructed narrative.

Conclusion

This chapter has set out the nature of my research project into meanings of equal marriage in the Church of England and the reasons why the research has been undertaken. I have engaged formal voices of theology to construct a conceptual loom as the academic context for my research, to engage with participants' operant and espoused voices of theology and with the Church's normative voice, in Chapters 2 and 3. In Chapter 4, I weave strands from all four sources of voices of theology together, considering changes in liturgy and practice towards answering my research question.

Chapter 2

Operant voices of theology in conversation with three benefits of marriage in the Church of England

Introduction

In this chapter, I bring meanings of marriage and partnership among participants into conversation with the Church of England's assertion of 'the intrinsic nature of marriage as the union of a man and a woman' through exploring three benefits of marriage: mutuality, fidelity and biological complementarity with the possibility of procreation (Church of England, 2012, p. 3, para 6).

Firstly, I summarise recent changes in the social context of the contemporary Church of England in liturgy, practice and changing attitudes that underlie this research. Next, I argue that all of my research participants' operant theologies of equal union – lived in their own relationships of marriage or partnership – are based on the Church's first two benefits: mutuality; and fidelity. The Church of England has recognised the potential for same-sex relationships to embody mutuality and fidelity[100] in lived experience and practice. In the second part of this chapter, I focus on the Church's third benefit of marriage, asserted to be 'biological complementarity with the possibility… of procreation,' (2012) as the source of conflicting theologies of marriage within the Church of England.

I bring representative constructions – interpreted as operant theologies from co-constructed narratives through qualitative interviews with my participants – into conversation with the Church's three benefits of marriage (2012). I argue that mutuality and fidelity characterise all the relationships of my participants and consider these two benefits together. I explore participants' sense of equality in their relationships to argue that there is a *convergence* of operant theologies where mutuality and fidelity are benefits for both marriage and civil partnership. This leads me to explore further in Chapter 3 whether the Church of England can offer a liturgy with blessing for civil partners in church, because of the recognition that mutuality and fidelity are often embodied by same-sex

[100] 'The proposition that same-sex relationships can embody crucial social virtues is not in dispute. Same-sex relationships often embody genuine mutuality and fidelity…, two of the virtues which the Book of Common Prayer uses to commend marriage.' (House of Bishops, 2014).

relationships as well as in marriage. In Chapter 4, I propose that the Church provides a liturgy to welcome couples in church after civil partnership.

I test the third benefit of marriage asserted in the Church's response, the biological complementarity of one man and one woman, as the basis for its understanding of marriage as only for mixed-sex couples. I survey changes in the social context of the last century in England due to significant shifts in law, practice and attitudes towards the procreation of children. I show that changes in the prevention and assistance of conception have had a major impact on couples' choices for parenting or to remain child-free. I conclude that these changes undermine the Church's assertion of an underlying biological complementarity as essential, leading into Chapter 3 where I interpret two distinct strands of espoused theologies of marriage and partnership from narratives co-constructed with my participants, with a third strand affirming responsible choices for parenting and the nurture of children.

Representative constructions

Narratives in representative constructions retain participants' voices as far as possible (Bold, 2012, p. 147), anonymised for confidentiality by changing names and places. The representative constructions in Chapters 2 and 3 are grouped together by themes, reflecting my data analysis and interpretation. These themes develop in conversation with the first two benefits of marriage in this section and, in Chapter 3, as espoused theologies of marriage and partnership based on all three benefits. A detailed dialogue with the Church's normative theology and liturgy in Chapter 4 leads to proposals for reform.

Participants' operant and espoused theologies interpreted in this research have qualities of prayerfulness and, I propose, sometimes move naturally into poetic and liturgical forms. Following Nicola Slee, I interpret poetry, prayer and liturgy as not only words but calling listeners and performers 'above and beyond' through including gaps, pauses and non-verbal sounds. I indicate pauses in representative constructions in this chapter by the symbol [], retaining participants' repetitions and rephrasing to enable the hearing of voices 'from a deeper source than the conscious self' (Slee, 2014, p. 11). In Chapter 3, I introduce a form of layout to represent emerging, tentative, espoused theologies voiced in a poetic, prayerful construction. Both formats seek to enable the reader to engage with the reflective narratives and respond from within their own experience (Bold, 2012, p. 146).

Two benefits of marriage, mutuality and fidelity, in liturgy and practice in the Church of England

This research identifies three significant trends over the past century in changing practice within the Church of England, underlying participants' operant and espoused theologies of equal marriage: changes in marriage liturgy; in choosing to marry; and in parenting or remaining child-free. Social changes influencing these trends in the wider context in England include reforms to the legal framework for women and men working and caring for children, and innovation through research with new knowledge in medical and surgical practices.

Changes in liturgies for marriage

The Church of England's Common Worship liturgy of marriage (2000, pp. 108–114) shows the first area of change, where the vows of both bride and groom promise the same commitment: to love and to cherish one another. Since the first English language prayer book of the Reformation, the enactment of marriage has shifted in practice. In 1549 the groom vowed to love and comfort the bride followed by her different vow, to obey and serve her husband (Boswell, 1995, pp. 323-6). By the 20th century, the bride promised to love, cherish and obey,[101] words that were retained in the alternative, second form of vows in 1977 with an expansion of the groom's promise: to love, cherish and worship (Church of England, 1977, p. 8).

Although there are traditional options in the Notes to the service (2000),[102] there is no reference in the marriage liturgy rubric[103] to the custom of the father accompanying his daughter into the church and processing towards the groom. The rubric no longer includes the father giving the bride away[104] to the groom, reflecting the contemporary equal legal

[101] Church of England. (1928; revised 1965). Retrieved from http://www.oremus.org/liturgy/series1/marriage.html

[102] The father or a family member may escort the bride, or the bride and groom may enter church together. Note 4. (Church of England, 2000, p. 132). In my pastoral marriage practice, brides have chosen to be escorted by their father, mother, stepfather, adult son, both parents, brother, grandfather or pre-school daughter. Grooms have chosen a female relative or friend as 'best man.'

[103] A rubric in a liturgy was often in red ink, giving instructions or options.

[104] The rubric in 1997 stated that 'The priest may receive the bride from the hands of her father' (Church of England, 1977, pp. 7–8). This was optional and was not a direct transfer of the bride by father to groom. In Common Worship a Note to the Marriage Service (2000, p. 133) offers the option of 'Giving Away,' where the bride's father, another family member or friend gives her right hand to the minister to place in the bridegroom's right hand. This continues the practice of someone other than the bride herself giving her hand away, and also includes the minister in the giving, rather than the bride giving her own hand to the groom when he offers his right hand prior to making his vow. In

status of the couple. These absences demonstrate the gradual change from marriage as an alliance between two families (Boswell, 1995, pp. 32, 51) to the bride and groom acting independently by choosing freely to marry each other. The Common Worship ritual requires each of the couple to make their declarations and their vows independently, before witnesses, without coercion.[105] At the heart of the Common Worship marriage liturgy are three requirements: *capability*, that the couple are legally able and free to marry, which is ascertained prior to the service;[106] and, during the marriage service before witnesses, the couple give their *consent* by in turn making the Declarations of their intention to marry, followed by the *enactment* of the marriage, where the couple marry each other by making the Vows with their right hands and the same words.[107] The Notes offer an optional order for both the legal parts of the service, the Declarations and the Vows, to be either the bride or the groom first (2000, p. 133, Note 7), although the rubric in the liturgy continues to state the traditional order of the groom first (2000, p. 108). The priest officiates by enabling the ritual with words and actions, praying God's blessing and, as registrar, completes the marriage registers.[108] Since 2000 these changes have enabled mixed-sex couples to perform their emerging ideal of equal marriage, based on their independence free from parental influence, gradually moving away from stereotypes associated with socially-gendered roles. For some participants, this emerging meaning of

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the Common Worship marriage liturgy without a rubric for giving away (2000, p. 108), this tradition is superseded. The bride and groom act as two independent people, marrying each other.

[105] For the Declarations, the couple do not hold usually hands, although there is no rubric to require this demonstration of independence. For the Vows, the taking of right hands is required independently by each of the couple, with the rubric 'They loose hands' between the two vows (2000, p. 108).

[106] Ascertained by the legal Preliminaries to the marriage: in the Church of England by the reading of Banns of Marriage or a marriage licence; or through the civil route of a Superintendent Registrar's Certificate. Retrieved from https://www.yourchurchwedding.org/article/legal-requirements/ and https://www.yourchurchwedding.org/article/superintendent-registrar-certificates/

[107] In Series 3, the vows included 'worship' for the groom and 'obey' for the bride or both words were excluded, so that both promised only 'to love and to cherish.' (Church of England, 1977, pp. 7–8). Vows A or B were not interchangeable (1977, p. 2, Note 2).

In Common Worship, the Alternative Vows Form 1 (2000, p. 150) offer the option of the bride promising to 'obey' her husband without adding the theological equivalent of 'worship' in the husband's vow, thus unbalancing the two vows and making them theologically unequal. To obey and to worship in the two vows developed from the reciprocal actions in the reading from Ephesians 5 where wives were to 'be subject to your husband as you are to the Lord' while husbands were advised to 'love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her,' in the metaphor of Christ as loving groom and the Church as beloved bride. The passage, a suggested Bible reading for weddings, begins, 'Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ,' in contemporary translations, setting the context for the following verses (Ephesians 5.21–33, NRSV). In the Alternative Vows Form 2 (2000, p. 151), the unequal traditional vows have an option to become equal by removing the bride's promise to obey.

[108] Banns Registers in the Church of England and national Marriage Registers now record the 'condition' of the couple as 'Single' rather than 'Bachelor' or 'Spinster', removing archaic gendered language.

equal marriage between two independent people can include same-sex couples who seek to celebrate their union in church with God's blessing, in Chapter 3.[109]

A changing context for marriage in Church

The second trend in changing parish practice is the decisive point when the couple plan to marry. This point has shifted, from the era of participants in this research who got engaged but did not live together until after the legal contract in a church ceremony (before parenting), to the contemporary context where couples start with romance and personal love followed by cohabitation,[110] before planning the legal contract in a church (or civil) ceremony (by which time they may have children). Medical and legal changes have enabled the control of fertility through contraception (and abortion) and influenced social change. Increased legal protection accompanied a reduction in shame and insecurity for childbearing out of wedlock and illegitimacy of children. These changes have led to marriage being an optional choice, later in couples' relationships.[111]

Effective contraceptive use separated sexual activity from conception, so that romance and personal love now preoccupy couples in their early years together, followed by setting up a household and developing a balance between their working and home lives. Cohabitation of couples may be 'a marriage firewall' for testing the relationship, lowering early divorce rates.[112] Children are welcomed into the relationship and household without social stigma in an accepted context for the birth and care of the 48.1% of children born outside marriage or civil partnership.[113] Control of fertility permits couples to limit their

[109] Photograph albums of participants' wedding and civil partnership receptions showed that wedding clothing, cars with ribbons, sparkling wine, confetti and other customs (such as the gifts received) were, in practice, part of a 'traditional' ceremony.
[110] Over 3 million couples are cohabiting in the UK. Equal Civil Partnerships. (2018). *The legal challenge*. Retrieved from http://equalcivilpartnerships.org.uk/legal-challenge/
[111] The average age at marriage for men rose to 37.5 years and women 35.1 (2015) compared with 27 and 25 years in 1970. (Haines, N. (2018). Marriages in England and Wales: 2015. *Office of National Statistics, Statistical Bulletin.* Retrieved from https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/marriagecohabitationandcivilpartnerships/bulletins/marriagesinenglandandwalesprovisional/2015#the-average-age-at-marriage-continued-to-rise)
[112] Beaujouan, É., & Bhrolcháin, M. (2011). Cohabitation and marriage in Britain since the 1970s. *Population Trends*, *145*. p. 19 and pp. 14–15. Retrieved from http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/population-trends-rd/population-trends/no--145--autumn-2011/index.htm
[113] The lower the age of motherhood, the higher proportion of couples are cohabiting, or registering the child together with different parental addresses. (Haines, N. (2016). Live births by type of registration and mother's age group, 2015. *Office of National Statistics, Statistical Bulletin*. Retrieved from

reproduction to two children (average 1.76 in 2017)[114] so that childcare responsibilities can be balanced with work outside the home maintaining both parents' careers, with two incomes for the household. This impacts on gender roles and associated stereotypes, because both parents contribute economically through working, with similar opportunities for education and training and choices to share childcare within the legal and social framework.[115]

For clergy participants in pastoral practice, this shift impacts on meanings of marriage because the majority of couples booking a church wedding are cohabiting with the same address for residence on the application form and recorded in the marriage registers. Marriage preparation, in my professional practice over 20 years in conversation with mixed-sex couples in Church of England parishes,[116] centres on their ideal and practice of equality between them, often sensed as an equality before God (or 'something beyond') through discovering romantic love together and living in cohabitation. The couple desire their equal marriage to be celebrated in church and blessed by God, with their families and friends around them, moving into the next stage of their shared life: legalised, blessed and recognised in public. I argue below that this emphasis on equal, reciprocal partnership in practice, in participants' narratives of marriage and same-sex partnership later in this chapter and in Chapter 3, offers potential for a reformed theology of Christian equal marriage based on mutuality and fidelity, with optional responsible choices for parenting and the nurture of children.

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https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/livebirths/bulletins/birthsbyparentscharacteristicsinenglandandwales/2015)

[114] Haines, N. (2018). Births in England and Wales: 2017. *Office of National Statistics, Statistical Bulletin*. Retrieved from https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/livebirths/bulletins/birthsummarytablesenglandandwales/2017

[115] Research on the effect of part-time working shows adverse effects for career progress. Combining work with parenting remains a difficult and contested area to navigate for both parents. (van Osch, Y., & Schaveling, J. (2017). The effects of part-time employment and gender on organisational career growth. *Journal of Career Development*, *1–16*. Retrieved from https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0894845317728359)

[116] Parishes in this research were traditional geographical parish churches (of the national established Church of England) where every resident has a right to marry whether they are churchgoers, practising Anglicans or not. In addition, some couples choose to attend a church from beyond parish boundaries and by attendance may gain the right to marry. Some parish clergy accept bookings for marriage in church as part of their mission when the couple fulfils the secular, civil route for legal Preliminaries, the Superintendent Registrar's Certificate, which does not require any church affiliation or attendance.

Changing options for parenting

The third trend is new options for parenting and family life for couples (and for single parents). Later in this chapter, I argue that this area of changing practice challenges the Church's third asserted benefit of marriage (2012) – the biological complementarity of the couple with the possibility of procreation.

Mutuality and fidelity as benefits of both marriage and civil partnerships in the Church of England, interpreted in this research

In this section I argue that representative constructions of operant theologies of marriage and partnership, interpreted from interviews with participants, illustrate legal and social changes in practice both *away from* and *towards* marriage. I interpret married participants' operant (and in the next chapter, espoused) theologies as moving *away from* traditional practices of hierarchical, unequal marriage because their ideals and practices aspire to a more equal union in terms of gender, as mixed-sex couples. These moves away from hierarchy and towards equality inform my proposal for reform of the Church's current marriage liturgy to provide gender-neutral language (for mixed-sex couples), in Chapter 4.

Representative constructions for participants in civil partnerships offer evidence that some same-sex couples aspire *towards* equal marriage.[117] This *convergence of operant theologies* from participants' marriage relationships and civil partnerships, affirms and deepens meanings of the Church's traditional benefits of marriage, mutuality and fidelity, which are also recognised by the Church as virtues possible in same-sex partnerships. This leads to my proposed reform (Chapter 4) to permit same-sex couples in civil partnerships (or civil marriages) to receive prayer for God's blessing in churches. In Chapter 3, I interpret two strands of emerging espoused theologies in the Church of England towards meanings of equal marriage: for mixed-sex couples only (within the Church's normative theology); and for all couples, in Church (mixed- and same-sex). The two strands lead to my proposal (Chapter 4) that the Church tests two liturgies in parallel, for equal marriage (mixed-sex) and for blessing of civil unions. This arises from all participants' espoused theologies of pastoral welcome for couples after civil unions, with prayers for God's blessing.

[117] Clergy in same-sex relationships and civil partnerships are not permitted to marry if they seek to hold a bishop's licence to practise as a priest in the Church of England.

Social and Church contexts

The social expectation at the time of participants' marriages in this research was that children were born after marriage. This traditional context sustained shame for unmarried mothers and their families with illegitimate children ('born out of wedlock'[118]) and led to short-notice 'shotgun' weddings with a pregnant bride.

For women, in the Church of England, ordination was not legal under canon law until 1985 (deacons, ordained 1986), 1993 (priests, 1994) and 2014 (bishops, 2015).[119] When participants in this research married (c. 1960–90), the Church continued its traditional normative theology of chastity except within marriage (Church of England, 1991) and of a male-only priesthood, with marriage permitted for clergy.

Social norms, laws and expectations around couples and family life were gradually changing within civil society, influencing clergy families where wives worked outside the home and, in time, could be ordained themselves. People in Church, including clergy, who were non-heteronormative lived in a context of '"don't ask, don't tell" silos' (Wilson, 2014, p. xvi) where sexuality was closeted by the institution and any relationships were strictly private.

Mutuality and fidelity within mixed-sex marriage

In this section, I interpret married participants' lived practices of ***equal marriage between mixed-sex spouses*** as operant theologies of marriage in the Church of England. Within the traditional Church context of childbearing after marriage, but contrasting with earlier traditions of marriage alliances between families with close protection of young women to preserve their chastity and value (Boswell, 1995, p. 169), my research participants narrated how as independent young people they decided to marry. Romance, friendship and collegiality are themes, I argue, that are converging with the experience of same-sex couples in civil partnership who seek an equal union, whose stories follow. In Chapter 4, I argue that this convergence resonates with premodern Christian liturgies in church for same-sex friendships as well as with contemporary marriage rites.

[118] One third of children born out of wedlock (2017) were not to cohabiting couples. (Maguire Family Law. (2015, December 3). *Children born out of wedlock*. Retrieved from https://www.family-law.co.uk/children-born-out-of-wedlock/)

[119] Bingham, J. (2015, January 26). Women in the Church of England: A century of waiting. *The Telegraph.* Retrieved from https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/religion/11368767/Women-in-the-Church-of-England-a-century-of-waiting.html

Kindling: starting the relationship

Six of the married participants in this research met and married in their early 20s, soon after completing their education or, in one case, whilst a student. For these couples, married for 35 to 55 years, the social (and the Church) norm was to marry before setting up a household. A further participant married later in life. Representative constructions, indented in the text, interpret narratives (co-constructed with participants in interview and interpreted as operant theologies of marriage) lived in practice, the basis for participants' evolving espoused theologies of equal marriage in Chapter 3.

Attraction and romance

Jen's story began with a spark of romantic inspiration 35 years ago:

> In the back of a car, at Reading railway station. I saw the back of Phil's head, he was driving the car. I saw the back of his head and I got into the back of the car, looked at the back of his head and thought, 'I'm going to marry that man.' I hadn't even seen his face and I didn't know his name. It was just [laughing], it was just absolutely instantaneous. It was very unexpected, because at the time I was only 19, and I certainly had no intention of settling down until I was a minimum of 30, which in those days was quite ancient to be thinking about being married. It was just a feeling of absolute certainty. When it was instantaneous. Oh gosh. [whispering] How would I describe growing closer together? [long pause] A delicate dance, I think, is the [laughing] best way to describe it, because, [] he's very shy [] and I was his first ever girlfriend. And we were from very, very, very different social backgrounds, socio-economic backgrounds []. So I think that it, it was very tentative, very tentative. Actually, getting to know each other, was very – a very tentative thing []. Okay, so now that I've said it was a tentative [laughing] thing, it's going to sound incredibly immediate! So we met on the 15th May, and [] we [] didn't then meet again, we were together that weekend but we then didn't meet again until August. We spent a week together in August and during that time we just decided that that was – so we were officially engaged in October. And then married in the July []. Well, we're coming up to our 34th wedding anniversary. So that's 35 years, I guess. At least 35 years.

Prior to the widespread social acceptance of cohabitation, when romance kindled a relationship, engagement could follow within a short time followed by marriage and setting

up home together. Married participants in this research did not share a house together before their wedding, so that the impetus to marry early was strong.

Friendship

David married Caroline at the age of 23, six months before his ordination as a priest, when Caroline had already started work as a teacher. After living apart for the first six months while David completed his residential training, they moved into their first home together, a curate's tied house in the parish. He recalled:

> We met in our prams. We went to the same infant school together and lived in the same village. And throughout our teenage years we were part of a group. I went away to school, and there was a group of boys and girls, and we grew up together. It wasn't an entirely straightforward relationship. We didn't get on terribly well as early teenagers, and the like. But then I formed – I had a girlfriend, as I left school, in fact, and she came to visit us in our village. And this resulted in emissaries being sent by Caroline to see whether this was true or real or what! [laughing] And then in my first year at university, I came back in the middle of the first term, I think it was, or second term, for one of the group's 21st birthday. And the rest, as they say, is history. We've known each other for nearly [75 years] now.

Rick looked back to 'being very, very good friends' as the basis for their marriage. He met Jess at

> Senior High School, and it was at that point – fourth form we call it now – we both happened to be in the same form together. So we kind of knew each other, and, [] then eventually started going out together and that's been pretty much it really. Yeah. Yeah, a good while ago now. [] Well I suppose, I think [] I think the fact that we were friends before anything else [made us decide to settle down together]. And for quite a while [] just – kind of just fitted together really. I mean, as it turns out the actual getting married was precipitated by the fact that, Jess – rather in an unplanned sort of way – found herself to be expecting our daughter. So that focused things in a particular way. We made the decision to get married. [] But [] I don't know, we just, but [] but before any – before all that side of things, we were just very, very good friends and – I think it would be fair to say that we've always remained so, as much anything. We've always enjoyed each other's company. So the

> decision, the decision to stick together and make it, as it were, permanent (of course, we're talking now about the mid-to-late '70s, so, whereas I suppose many people these days make those decisions and settle down together) but in that context, and bearing in mind the sort of – we both came from a particular kind of background, in my case a very traditional working class – there were certain assumptions, and so we didn't just [] set up home, we got married.

When Rick applied for selection for training to be a priest in the Church of England in the early 1980s, he was made aware of traditional expectations of chastity and that the date of his marriage had been noted:

> I always remember going to the Selection Conference, reading my form upside down [while] I was having the interview with the Chair of the thing. And he'd [written] in red biro, a red ballpoint, round two dates, one was the date of our marriage and one was the date of Liz's birth. He'd obviously made a note of it. Actually, he was perfectly okay about it. But he did want to know.

Friendship was the beginning for **Fiona,** who met John in their teens, at school:

> He was a cousin of my best friend, at secondary school. That's how we met. Yeah. When I was about [] 16, 17. Friendship, mainly, to begin with – well, entirely to begin with. Just friendship. Which then surprisingly developed into something more. But at the outset it was purely friendship. I can't actually tell you the moment when it [laughing] changed from friendship to something more, I don't know, I can't pinpoint that. But very gradual, really, yeah. So by the time that had happened we were already friends so it was sort of – we got engaged and were very soon – well I think we were only engaged for twelve months, if that. Yeah. Because it had all happened before, [laughing] if you understand what I mean? Actually, I probably knew him from being eleven, we were at secondary school. But it will be 16, 17 when it started – yeah, when there was [] it had started to change but I would be 18, probably, because I was married at 20, just. Yeah.

Working together

Steph and James both trained for full time ministry in the Church of England, at a time before women could be ordained either deacon or priest. She looked back to a working relationship in their early days as students:

> [laughing] We met at Theological College, and my first meeting with James I thought, 'Hm, he's very hard to make conversation with.' It was about the first weekend we were there, and I thought, 'Ah, I can't be bothered with this chap.' And I never really – and we ended up on the student exec a year later. [] So we started to form a working relationship on the student exec. It just sort of flowed quite naturally, really. I think that was because of the house of – being in a residential theological institution – and theological, because, sort of, teacher training colleges or universities of the day, they were small and they worked on a family basis, because of the all Christian ethos. So there was a sort of – it was a sort of family. I suppose we tried to live out a true Christian community. Because we were all aspiring, young; and, sort of an Evangelical college that made it even more whatever… So it just sort of happened. It all developed very naturally.

Steph and James began their relationship on a basis of equality as students and with a sense of a shared life together in ministry. However, they trained in a wider Church of England context where their paths in ministry would be very different, because of their genders. When they left college, James was ordained deacon in the Church of England and priest a year later, while Steph was commissioned as a lay minister, a deaconess. Meanwhile, as a married couple, there were parish expectations about the roles within the Church context of both 'the newly ordained curate' James, and 'the clergy wife' or 'unpaid assistant' Steph, that affected their marriage and their ministry.

Sarah knew Alan as a colleague at throughout her professional career, until retirement:

> We knew each other as colleagues for [many] years and we would go out to lunch from time to time with other colleagues, we got on well, we were always friendly. And Alan at that time was married, and really, when [things became difficult], which was a great shock to him, I think work became a bit of a refuge for him. So – and those of us who were his friends and colleagues were supporting him through that process. And we started to grow closer to one another, kind of as the divorce went through, and it was really after that that, obviously, we became attached to one another – it was a great surprise to both of us. I mean, I was in [mid-life], something like that, and he's older than I [am]. And I don't think he'd at all been looking for another relationship. I'd sort of – well, not ceased to think about a relationship, but certainly hadn't been looking for one at all at that stage. And so it was a big surprise

> for both of us, but actually, we knew each other quite well, though entirely platonically. So probably we didn't have all the hurdles to go through possibly, with a couple meeting each other and going out in the traditional way, because we had that common background.

These operant theologies of marriage based on friendship, working together and romance, arising from lived practice within the Church of England, form a foundation for married participants' espoused theologies of equality within marriage. In the following sections I tease out the qualities of mutuality and fidelity they have experienced within long term marriage relationships.

Equality and partnership

Jen expressed both an ideal and an awareness of reality in practice: she held an espoused theology of human being based on equality before God in tension with how they lived (operant theology) within married life. She distinguished between mutuality as a choice, and duty and loyalty as obligations. Jen also deepened the meaning of fidelity within an equal relationship, beyond the physical.

> I feel that we're both completely equal before God. Absolutely. I don't think there's any question about that. We're all built in God's image;[120] we're all unique and wonderfully loved and – so I, I, I think, absolutely. We are equal in God's eyes. [] So I don't know [] that the notion of equality before God translates into, a need to be equal in [] the relationship. Duty and loyalty are things that have been laid on me, whereas mutuality is something that I choose to adopt. So yeah, mutuality is important. For me, fidelity goes above and beyond the physical. So, emotional fidelity counts as much, if not more than physical fidelity, I think.

Fiona felt that being equal was essential in her marriage with John:

> Oh yes, definitely. Yeah. You've got to be. Otherwise somebody is going to feel [] used, aren't they? If they're not equal. Yeah, I wouldn't like not to feel equal. No. And I think that's possibly because we were friends, first. And I think that probably has a lot to do with it, to be honest. Because we knew each other as friends first. And in that sort of friendship, that probably needs to be worked at, because you don't know anybody until you marry them do you? To be honest. [laughing] We had already worked through friendship before we were married, so we didn't have to work at

[120] Genesis 1.26–27. See Chapter 4 for a dialogue with liturgy.

> that, it was already there. Yeah. That respect for one another, helping each other as well in different situations, if there was problems there we could talk – it was very strange really. You've got that background.

Her observation, that until you marry you don't know someone, reflected the prevailing social context in the late 1970s where cohabitation had not yet become an accepted way of a couple setting up home together.

David looked back on over 55 years of married life with Caroline, balancing work and family life, living in vicarages:

> I think it has been very much so [a relationship of equals]. And I have always, I think, wanted to encourage Caroline to develop whatever professional skills and experience and work that was, she felt to be, appropriate. And of course, we were very blessed in that I had a job in which I worked mostly – well I worked from home. And with a quite flexible way of working which enabled her to pursue her teaching profession, which she did. When – for four years, well when Tom was born of course, she came out of work, she stopped that. Now three years later, Harry was born, but we had a child who died, earlier on. Then I think after Harry was born she did examining GCSEs, examining and marking, which was really just for the summer, a few weeks. And then one morning a week, and then one day a week, and then a day and a half a week, then two days, as the children grew up. So both our professions worked well as us being able – not having tensions. But, the short answer to your question is I, I think right at the very beginning, perceived that we were a marriage of equals. I think there was another bit of dynamic in this, and that was that as a teacher, particularly in those early days, Caroline was earning so much more than I was.

In practice, David and Caroline had balanced professional working lives with having their children, aided by David working from their vicarages with some flexibility of hours, although he also commented on late evening meetings and weekend commitments intruding on family life. Caroline's fulfilment of a professional career and having young children in the 1960s was at a time when many women took a longer break and lost seniority. Fathers had no entitlement to leave after a birth until 1999.[121] Clergy wives

[121] The maternity allowance for 18 weeks did not provide job protection when Caroline had children. Participants in this research who married in the 1970s–1980s had protection with up to 40 weeks' leave (payment for 18 weeks) from 1977, under certain conditions of employment. (OECD Family Database. (2017). pp. 46–47. Retrieved from

increasingly combined the traditional roles of unpaid assistant and mother with working outside the home, to bring an income to the family to supplement the clergy stipend.

Sarah's sense of equality with Alan was rooted in their equivalent status, achievements and financial independence, creating a marriage that felt equal in practice.

> It's a very interesting question, [do you feel you are equals in your relationship?] because I hadn't really thought about it, but yes, very much so. Again, I think partly that's been easier because we married late and we both in a way established ourselves in life before we married. One of the things that I hadn't really thought about, but I realised was very important in that equality, is that financially we are – we own about the same in terms of assets. We've kept our money independent, though of course we share costs and things like that. We both have the same attitude to money, we're both quite cautious. And, having known some other couples where I think money has been a big issue, and I can imagine – I can't imagine myself ever being comfortable with being entirely financially dependent on somebody else. There are lots of other things as well. We both reached, as it happens, exactly the same level, professionally, in [the] office so we were the same grade when we left. And again, I'm not actually putting a huge amount of value on that, but I think it just helped that we've got different, very different, personalities, but complementary skills.

She later explained that her mother's difficult experiences, of living in a tied house (for her husband's employment), parenting and not being able to work, had made Sarah value independence and self-reliance as a woman:

> I think that made me determined that I was never going to be in a position where, you know, you were so – where I couldn't depend on myself, or where it's complicated. But, but I'm sure that was part of the underlying reason that being independent became so important. And probably why I didn't get married till I was [in mid-life]. [laughing] Because partly, as I say, by that stage a) I'd got past childbearing age, and b) I was kind of financially, and everything else, independent.

https://www.oecd.org/els/family/PF2_5_Trends_in_leave_entitlements_around_childbirth_annex.pdf)

Rick's family background and parents' marriage had influenced his approach to equality within his own marriage relationship:

> I began to realise that [] that [] the power dynamics in any given relationship will always be shifting. And often, the unofficial ways in which it works are often the more powerful ones. But it also meant [] that I was very determined when we got married to try and [] work within that in a very different way. And it must be said, I think in the early years of our married life, one of the challenges for me, was, having known a household where the – in a very obvious way – the power was with the woman, I was very sensitive to that. And that took some working out. But eventually [] we [] we didn't sit down and have a single discussion, but it – we got to the point where I began to – as I began to get more clear in my head what I thought was going on and throughout the period of our married life, when they (my parents) were still alive, seeing how their relationship went [] I was constantly looking for ways for it not to be like that. And as it happens, Jess being the person she is, very open, very generous actually, in so many ways; and going back to my earlier point about one of the most powerful [] foundations you might say, of our relationship, was a real friendship and just enjoyment of one another's company. We eventually were able to forge – and it took some doing, [] a sense of marriage as a partnership, really.

Steph described how their experience in practice as married ministers living in vicarages for 35 years had worn down her early sense of mutuality and equality, by contrasting parish life with their experience during time off:

> And do you know what, the best times, for both of us, is when we're on holiday. [] No parish. Just *us*. [] Or us and the [children] in previous days. But, yeah. I get a different job. The relationship takes on a different – because there's none of all those [] he's left his other [] [laughing] his other wife! [laughing] Yes. Yeah. Well we're much more equal and [] yes, and the whole world opens up! Because we say, 'We're not talking about parish, or church anymore.' And for the most part, we don't. And if we start to, we say, 'Look, now, come on, we're not doing this.' But then as soon as it gets to the last day and the journey home [] you feel yourself being [] *sucked* back in. In some ways, *sucked* back down into a tunnel. [] It's how I see it these days.

Steph and James's experience reflects the challenges to living an equal marriage in practice between mixed-sex couples, both from unequal status in their working context and from traditional gendered expectations of the roles of motherhood and of being a (female) clergy

spouse. Whilst David's wife, Caroline, had worked outside the vicarage to achieve a senior career as a teacher whilst sharing care of two children, Steph felt unable to fulfil her own vocation in practice due to living and working within parish contexts. Rick's wife, Jess, had also worked outside their vicarages, maintaining a balance with Rick as a parish priest, caring for two children. Sarah, however, had seen the pitfalls in her own mother's experience of dependence and isolation as a wife and mother in tied housing who was unable to work, leading to Sarah's decision to remain single without children, preferring an independent career until marriage in mid-life. These different expressions of women's experience provide glimpses of changing expectations in mixed-sex relationships, where couples are increasingly aspiring to a sense of equality between them (espoused theologies) and seeking equality in practice (operant), as the social and legal imbalances between women and men gradually move towards more equal opportunities in employment and childcare.[122]

These six research participants' narratives provide a base line for a conversation with the experience of same-sex couples' experiences of mutuality and fidelity, some as parents with the nurture of children. I argue that all of the research participants agree that mutuality and fidelity are significant foundations for and virtues of their committed relationships, whether marriage or civil partnerships, and thus affirm these two benefits from the Church of England's normative theology of marriage, broadened to include same-sex civil partnerships.

Mutuality and fidelity within civil partnerships

Research participants in committed same-sex relationships had met prior to the introduction of civil partnerships (2006), at a time when couples had no legal protection outside mixed-sex marriage.[123] The three research participants who formalised their relationships in civil partnerships as soon as the law was changed had not taken the step provided in the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013 to convert their union to civil marriage. Two of the participants were clergy, prohibited from marrying by the Church of

[122] 'Shared Parental Leave' (for either parent up to 50 weeks) was enacted in 2015. A survey of reforms in UK law for parenting summarises changes in the social context 1999–2015. (OECD Family Database. (2017). *PF 2.5 annex: Detail of change in parental leave by country*. UK, pp. 46–47. Retrieved from https://www.oecd.org/els/family/PF2_5_Trends_in_leave_entitlements_around_childbirth_annex.pdf)

[123] This remains the situation for cohabiting mixed-sex couples.

England whilst holding a Bishop's licence to officiate as a priest (Church of England, 2014). The third lay participant would have married had it been an option at the point of their formal legal commitment.

The three civil-partnered participants narrated qualities of mutuality and fidelity in their relationships, continuing the patterns of stories of married participants above. I interpret similarities and differences between participants' operant practices and espoused theologies.

Kindling: starting the relationship: attraction, romance and friendship

Rob's story of his relationship with Ben began at the turn of the millennium, when internet dating for LGBT couples was a new phenomenon:

> We met on the internet. And we just saw each other's photographs there, and just started chatting, and then suddenly we started finishing each other's sentences and thought, 'Yeah, this is actually a real conversation.' And so we met and went to the cinema, together… you know, we met, he accidentally went to the wrong cinema and I thought I'd been stood up. Eventually he ran up, late, out of breath, 'Sorry, I was at the other one!' And we eventually went to the cinema, and we just *got on*, really, really well. Laughed at the same jokes. Found the same sort of things funny. Yeah, same taste in films. Literature. Not music, completely different tastes in music. So [laughing] we complement each other, and occasionally I drag him along to listen to [classical] and he takes me to go and see [contemporary]! [laughing] so we, we enjoy different musical views. But that's how we met and that's now going back some fifteen years.

Rob described how they decided to set up home together, in a vicarage where he was the senior priest.

> The spark was certainly there. And that was, [] what made our relationship, such fun… It, it was, working well. Fairly early on, we introduced each other to our best friends, family, etc. And so using that website, similar-minded, largely professional people doing that, and so we introduced each other to each other's friends and became part of the same social scene and [] it's the sort of vicar thing; in a sense. Where, [] if you're going to do something you do it right. And we didn't want it to be a sort of casual thing. So we took the decision fairly early on – are we going to make this work? Yes. Okay. Let's do it right then. And then we sort of [] this was before civil

> partnerships were introduced. So we, it was just at a time when I was about to move jobs, and so when we moved jobs, he moved with me. And so we were, we committed to being together from that stage. And then as soon as civil partnerships became possible then we did it fairly early on, in the new dispensation [at the] beginning of 2007.

Luke and Matt had moved in the same circles for some years before getting together. Luke narrated:

> We met at [a senior cleric's] installation at the [major church]. Although we probably had met before, because, Matt had been in [the church] for quite a long time. And obviously I had been in the diocese a reasonable time before that. So, we were certainly present at things that, we'd both been at, at the same time. And we vaguely remember each other. We can say that our first proper meeting was then. We were introduced by a fellow clergy person. [Next,] I think all the normal things really. I think, [] he came down and we had a meal where I was living. [] And then we [laughing] had a grand date to somebody's installation, which tells you what [laughing] sort of ecstasy that we've had. At which point I had a flat tyre somewhere on the [major road]. So the … romantic evening meal didn't really happen [laughing] as we were stuck there, changing tyres and things, which has caused great amusement ever since really.

Luke recalled the gradual development of their committed relationship as 'normally, what people do' in terms of deciding to settle down together. He described the introduction of civil partnerships and how significant that was for a same-sex couple in the Church of England to become 'public' in their relationship.

> In a strange kind of way. It felt – I mean, what was happening was that the civil partnership was coming in as we were getting together really. So we first thought that – I think because we were living near London, we could register with something that Ken Livingstone had invented and we were going to do that.[124] And then a friend of ours, who is also clergy, said, 'Well why don't you wait for a little bit longer, and just see where this legislation goes?' So what happened was, we were together for two years, and then we had our civil partnership after that. So probably, normally,

[124] In his first term as London Mayor (2000–2004), Livingstone introduced the London Partnership Register allowing same-sex couples to register their relationships. (LGBT Archive. (2014, May 26). *Ken Livingstone*. Retrieved from http://www.lgbtarchive.uk/wiki/Ken_Livingstone)

> what people do, you know, they're together for a year then, and now there's an intention after a year and then have some sort of ceremony after that.

Luke recalled how sensitive the transition was, to becoming a public couple, in a vicarage, in the Church of England:

> Well [] it was all a bit – I mean the whole process was bizarre. Really. Because now, ten years on, if somebody, who was say, involved with the Church, says they want to have a civil partnership and what happens with bishops and what have you – it all seems to be far more mapped out, really, doesn't it? And people will have had different experiences. Whereas I think what we did was, we just weren't sure and we were still in the 'don't ask, don't tell,' type of environment. So did you tell? Did you not tell? How public were we going to make it? If we made it public, what would this mean? And, you look back and you think, 'Well, ten years on, we maybe might not have done it this way.'

Working together

Steve's story described social attitudes a decade prior to legislation for civil partnerships, when sexuality was often 'quite private' with life compartmentalised between home and work.

> We've been together for twenty years. We met working together, initially. I think, to start with, it was my first job and I was at the time - things have changed massively over that period of time – but it was always the case that when people used to ask about your personal life, I was always very wary in terms of what I said. And it would always be, 'My partner and I. We did this.' Rather than *she* or *her*; or *him* or *he*. I was quite private about it all. And I used to go home at the weekend – I used to live [there] during the week and then go home on a Friday night and come back first thing on the Monday morning. I booked a holiday, and one of the girls in the team, who was incredibly nosy, happened to see some holiday tickets, flight tickets or something of that ilk, and had a little nosy through them and noticed that the other was a male name. And then it was like, 'Oh, I noticed that you're going on holiday with another man. Does that mean that you're gay?' And you think – I mean, it's really sneaky, but you think, 'Well actually, there's no point lying about it, because if it then comes out at a later stage…' And I just said, 'Yeah. But to be honest I don't really publicise it.' That's just part of me. And I don't want to be labelled as a mincing queer, or whatever, you know, which you can do.

Word – gossip – soon got around at work. Steve continued,

> So, obviously, Tim then became aware of that. That I was gay. So, Tim found out, it became public knowledge that I was gay. And then we were out seeing a client and he said, 'I want to talk to you about something.' I think the client was delayed. It was in an Indian restaurant in [town]. And he said, 'I want to talk to you about stuff. So, when did you realise you were gay?' And I thought, 'Where is this going?' And he said, 'I think I'm gay actually.' And then it kind of happened, eventually. And we've been together ever since. And here we are! [laughing] But, it's worked. We had our civil partnership ten years ago. We adopted our son five-and-a-half years ago, and everything's good.

Steve recalled two reasons for becoming civil partners as soon as the law permitted, the legal situation for same-sex couples and the social context in their families.

> We talked about doing it, at some point. I suppose, predominantly, in the sense of having a celebration and some kind of acknowledgement of our relationship, because we've had sisters who've been married, and what have you. And we wanted some kind of official recognition. But also, from a practical perspective as well, in terms of (things have changed, subsequently) inheritance rights; in terms of next of kin; even hospital visiting rights, and things like that. Which, at the time, God forbid, if either of us were in hospital, there was no guaranteed right that you can actually even visit. Even if you are on a life support machine, you wouldn't actually be allowed to have any say about somebody that you shared your life with.

Legal partnership

All three civil-partnered research participants recalled the social context and attitudes prior to the introduction of civil partnerships, aware how much their lives had changed since becoming legal couples in public. **Rob** looked back:

> I mean I was [at primary school] when the law was changed and homosexuality was decriminalised. So I'm just conscious that my life, in a sense, has seen a huge change from time when people were imprisoned and, I mean, the Turing episode was not

> long before, and all that.[125] And then decriminalisation.[126] And now, to move within 50 years to, to the state in which that sort of equality is embedded in the DNA of our laws and our societal values. I'm talking about society and not the Church, because that's still got a 'little' battle to fight. But in terms of the public life of our nation from Members of Parliament, members of the House of Lords, members of the Judiciary, members of every echelon of every elite, is there and they are gay and they are open.

Rob described the shift in subculture when same-sex couples considered monogamy, in reaction to the AIDS outbreak.

> [] In having grown through the [] '80s, and I – as a gay person growing up. In the university in the '70s, and then going back to university in the '80s to do the theology and stuff – that was the whole period of, of the transition and the flux and the arrival of HIV and AIDS and all of those things. Had a *massive* impact on, on, on gay culture. And people who are gay. Much more so than people who are lesbian, I think that is a very significant *male* thing. And it did have the effect of, in the sense, knocking promiscuity on the head to a large extent. Where people felt that [] the safe thing to do was actually to be monogamous. And actually people discovered that monogamy was not that bad after all. And, in a sense, that led to the whole Jeffrey John 'Permanent, Faithful, Stable' ethos, which is the understanding which makes most sense.[127] To people who are gay. That's the relationship which people understand. That's the relationship which people respect.

Luke recalled the introduction of legal civil partnership as a major shift in his lifestyle, expectations and practice.

> That probably the gay culture that I grew up with was not around civil partnerships, and wasn't necessarily around public relationships… Because somebody wrote,

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[125] Alan Turing was convicted of gross indecency 31st March 1952. Died 1954. Pardoned 2013. The 'Turing Law' was part of the Policing and Crime Act 2017, when 50,000 men convicted of 'gross indecency' were pardoned posthumously and 15,000 living men could apply for a pardon. (Hedges, A. (n. d.). *Alan Turing's trial: Charges and sentences, 31 March 1952.* Retrieved from https://www.turing.org.uk/sources/sentence.html;
McCann, K. (2017, January 31). Turing's Law: Oscar Wilde among 50,000 convicted gay men granted posthumous pardons. *The Telegraph.* Retrieved from https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/01/31/turings-law-thousands-convicted-gay-bisexual-men-receive-posthumous/)

[126] The Sexual Offences Act 1967 decriminalised homosexuality between consenting men over the age of 21.

[127] (John, 2012 [1993]).

> before I was ordained, three weeks before I was ordained, to – and for reasons that I'm not quite so sure about– to the principal of my theological college, the Bishop of [diocese], the Bishop of [diocese], and my training incumbent, saying that I was an immoral person and basically shouldn't be ordained, because I was living a gay lifestyle in [city]. Now [] at that stage, I mean, that probably, I mean the life that I'd had was as, as wild as you can probably imagine. And so, when [] we had our partnership and our agreement and things, I felt that that particular area of my life had stopped.

He continued later, 'I think on a very sort of basic, ordinary level, if, if you're in a couple, of any sort, you're in a couple on one level, aren't you?' For Luke, the transition meant not only becoming a couple in a civil partnership, but as a priest he was required to affirm the relationship was celibate so that he could continue in ordained licensed ministry in the Church of England.[128]

Steve, who was younger than Rob and Luke, recalled

> I can remember the age of consent. When I identified as being gay, I would be a criminal because the age of consent [was still 21]. I think I was at university when it got reduced. I think I was about, I think I was 21, no, I think I was coming up to 21 when it got reduced to eighteen. And then of course, it got reduced to 16 quite soon after. And what, I'm [40s], so it's not that long ago really.[129]

The three research participants in civil partnerships had all established their relationships prior to the legal enactment of civil partnerships and as a result, were profoundly aware of the difference to their lives, now accepted in law and society as committed couples in households, with legal rights to adopt and foster children.

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[128] 'Getting married to someone of the same sex would, however, clearly be at variance with the teaching of the Church of England. The declarations made by clergy and the canonical requirements as to their manner of life do have real significance and need to be honoured as a matter of integrity' (Church of England, 2014, para. 26).
'The House is not, therefore, willing for those who are in a same-sex marriage to be ordained to any of the three orders of ministry. In addition, it considers that it would not be appropriate conduct for someone in holy orders to enter into a same-sex marriage, given the need for clergy to model the Church's teaching in their lives' (Church of England, 2014, para. 27).

[129] Sexual Offences Act 1967: Private homosexual acts between men aged over 21 were decriminalised, at the same time imposing heavier penalties on street offences.
Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994: The age of consent for gay men was lowered from 21 to 18, and further lowered to 16 (2001). (Parliament. (n. d.). *Regulating sex and sexuality: The 20th century.* Retrieved from https://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/private-lives/relationships/overview/sexuality20thcentury/)

Equality and partnership

Each of the three civil-partnered research participants experienced equality within their own relationships, noting that being the same gender meant that unequal social expectations based on traditional gendered roles did not apply to them as a couple. However, they expressed an awareness that being in civil partnership was still not equal to mixed-sex marriage in some contexts including marriage in the Church of England and, for members of the licensed clergy, civil marriage was not permitted. Values of equality, mutuality, fidelity and parenting within their civil partnerships were celebrated by the couples, their families and friends, but not by the Church of England which retains its normative theology of marriage for only mixed-sex couples and prohibits ceremonies or blessing after civil same-sex unions. This had created for some civil partners a 'we are, but we're not' feeling of being excluded, as Rob explained 'it's – so not the same, it's a sort of second-class thing, in the eyes of the Church.' Participants expressed their hopes that the Church of England would recognise further the presence of same-sex couples in committed, lifelong relationships, including licensed clergy and authorised laity.

The three participants approached the gap between their legal civil partnership and the Church's lack of celebration in different ways. Rob and Ben 'modelled' their relationship in parallel with marriage and would have married had it been possible. Luke preferred civil partnership and accepted the Church of England's requirement of celibacy as a 'pragmatic vocation,' so that both he and Matt could continue to affirm conformity to the Church's teaching on chastity except within marriage (mixed-sex) to hold licences as priests. Steve and Tim would have married had that been enacted earlier, but were content in practice with their civil partnership although aware that on legal forms a difference remained between being 'partners' and 'spouses'. They might consider converting their civil partnership to (civil) marriage in the future but did not want to detract from the joy and significance of their original ceremony and celebration.

Rob and Steve expressed a desire to be able to marry their respective partners in the Church of England, although for Steve the moment had passed and he had reduced his connection with the Church gradually over the years, having moved away from his inclusive, welcoming home parish. Luke considered marriage to be 'patriarchal,' especially in the social context of his urban parish, where there was 'definitely a *bloke* culture and… definitely a *woman* culture, and the two never meet.' Luke, therefore, considered civil partnership as offering potential for equality between two people as 'a new relationship.'

Participants' stories explain their differences in outlook regarding equality between marriage and civil partnerships.

Marriage or civil partnership

Rob talked about his relationship with Ben in terms of marriage, clearly understanding their union in practice as a marriage, albeit legally a civil partnership because the Church of England does not permit same-sex marriage for clergy. He narrated:

> Marriage is about what brings us together and what we are to each other. [Equality?] Absolutely. I mean, we are very different personalities. But we both have huge responsibilities, each of us in our work – me as a vicar, Ben as a [senior role]. And there's a lot of pressure that we both face. And because neither of us is the little wife at home, looking after the other, we are in a sense more able to demonstrate that equal-ness of who we are. It's not the vicar and his husband; and it's not the [senior role] and his husband; it's Rob and Ben. And we are, to each other, the support and the strength that is needed at the time. So, there are times when I slip into [senior role's] husband mode, and go to their works [yawning] and [colleagues'] dos. [laughing] Which are thrilling!

In Rob's partnership, Ben's active involvement both continued and subverted the traditional gendered role of 'vicar's wife.'

> And, Ben does an awful lot, in being the vicar's husband, because people call him 'the vicar's wife,' but we don't sort of, make that distinction. But he is very active, and very visibly active in supporting me in his participation in the life of the church and doing the many things that have been expected to have been done by the vicar's wife.

Regarding terminology and their understanding of their relationship within meanings of 'marriage,' Rob and Ben lived an 'equal marriage' between same-sex partners, considering that to live 'model[ling] that normality' with an equality between them worked in practice, both for their family and for people to accept them. He continued,

> And everybody understands the word 'husband', and that's what we've used just for sort of, ease of understanding, so it just makes it clear that he's my husband and this is our son. …Because, still, there are a lot of people for whom we are the only gay couple that they know. And, and we're trying to model that normality, which makes sense to them. I know that there are a lot of people who feel that the

> heteronormativity is not necessarily something which the LGBTQ agenda wants to promote. Perhaps there is something in that argument, as a philosophical basis for campaigning for something which is something less patriarchal, less heteronormative. Something which actually can be a little bit more queering the status quo. But for us, this relationship is very, very straightforward. And it's one that people can very easily understand and relate to and accept. And respect.

Luke's understanding differed. His critique of marriage as patriarchal and unequal, including in the Church's Common Worship marriage liturgy (2000), led him to value civil partnership as a different relationship.

> I quite like civil partnership because I think it is more equal. I find – I mean obviously I do quite a lot of weddings and I do find them odd. I mean [] I mean these days you can make a wedding whatever you want to. But even [] secular ceremonies have some element of, of male superiority, I think. [] I mean, in a church service, it does distinctly, however much you try and shave it off there. If I said to a bride, 'Well I'm not having you walk down the aisle with your father' then they would be really upset. But, but that's weird, isn't it? Really? I mean, you know, 'I'm giving…' And I know we don't say, 'Who giveth this woman to be married to this man?' unless they really, really want to. And even then, you know [laughing] but you, you're still handed over, aren't you?

Luke reflected further on whether marriage and civil partnership had a qualitative difference:

> [long pause] I mean, I suppose in having a civil partnership [] you are in some ways, paralleling marriage in some way, aren't you? I mean, you can't get away from that. But I think that, what I've been trying to suggest is that there are good things about marriage and there are also things about marriage that you feel aren't quite so – and I think that [] perhaps the civil partnership takes on board the good things about marriage.

He recognised the potential for same-sex marriage to enter a dialogue about meanings of marriage for mixed-sex couples in society and the Church, expressed through liturgy:

> Now, whether same-sex marriage takes on the good things about marriage and therefore doesn't deal with being given away, or, you know, certain language, because it is a completely different thing [] well, it depends what you think marriage

> is then, doesn't it really? And therefore, would be interesting if down the line the Church changed its mind and said, you know, 'We are, we are going to have marriage between whoever.' How does that then affect the rest of the liturgy that we're doing for heterosexual couples?

This potential for liturgy to offer a ceremony of equality for mixed-sex couples in marriage is considered in Chapter 4, in the light of premodern liturgies for same-sex friendships and of participants' insights into unequal marriage in the Church of England as the contemporary liturgy stands.

Luke would support civil partnerships for couples (mixed- and same-sex) who did not want to enter marriage because they considered it patriarchal and unequal. For him, unequal ceremonies and unequal roles meant that in practice marriage was not something he aspired to, whilst civil partnership offered new potential.

> People say, oh you know, 'Civil marriage is much better than civil partnership.' [] I'm not quite so sure why. Legally or, [] well legally, I'm not quite so sure how much difference that makes. And I, I think the thing with calling it marriage is, that you bring a baggage of marriage with you. [] So I think I'm probably happier with a civil partnership, really. And would be perhaps sympathetic with heterosexual couples who feel that a civil partnership was a more equal relationship. Because obviously it's, it's a new relationship [civil partnership], isn't it? And in some ways you could say, 'Oh well, you know, it's nothing to do with marriage. This is equal because it's two men or two women. And therefore, it's bound to be equal because it's different.' [] And I [] I still don't [] I still think there's something about marriage that means that one partner has one particular role and another partner has another particular role. [] And however much the defence is of it, I'm still not entirely convinced by it.

Should the Church of England change its normative theology and Parliament remove the quadruple lock from the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013, Luke thought about whether in parish practice he would accept same-sex marriage celebrated in Church.

> And I think if somebody came to me and said, you know, 'We really want to be married in a church,' and were two women, if that was permitted, that's up to them and not up to me. You're the, you're the vessel aren't you? I think, I think it would [concern me on pastoral grounds], because I think then you are making a difference, aren't you? Because you're saying to one group of people, 'In my head I'm not very happy about what you're doing, because I think this is a bit of an odd thing to be

> doing. But because the Church permits it and because you want to do it, I'm happy to perform this. And actually, I'll quite enjoy doing it because I quite like weddings.' [laughing] If then [] two people of the same-sex come along and they say, 'We want to have a Church wedding,' I might go through the same process and say, 'Why…?' but I then have to turn round to them and say, 'Well no, I can't do it.' [] And that's odd. I think that's odd. But that's not a theological statement. That's just a statement of, 'Maybe that's a bit peculiar.' I mean; I've never been asked. So I've never been in the situation whereby somebody's come to me and said, 'Can we do this?' So [] I think it would. I think I'd be – I think I'd be upset about the process of having to say, 'No.' Because I don't like doing that pastorally, whatever the situation is. So, it would concern me purely on that level. Not asking, 'What do you think you're doing?' 'Have you considered this is a patriarchal and' [laughing] you know? [laughing] Yeah.

Steve would have chosen marriage in Church had it been possible, and looked back at the inequality of opportunity compared with his sisters. By contrast with two of them having had church weddings in the family's home parish church, Steve clearly saw how different their civil partnership was. The location, registrar and secular context of the Town Hall lacked the familiar sacred place, clergy, musicians and faith context of St Olaf's, where parishioners had celebrated weddings for over 800 years and where, in Steve's childhood and young adulthood, he was fully part of the church family.

> Yes. Absolutely. At the time, without a doubt. It was open to my sisters to be able to have church weddings. Two did, one didn't. Just to have that opportunity. And when you think about it, at the time, having been at St Olaf's for a long time and going through Sunday School and being confirmed and all of that; growing up in that church family, it would have been nice to have had the option to actually celebrate our relationship in that setting with people who had seen me grow over the years. I don't know whether I'd want to do it now though, because like I said before, in terms of does it detract from what's already gone, but I think, yes, had there been the option to, it would have been…and to have some religious element in the service. Because with the civil partnership (not that you'd want to) you couldn't even play Robbie Williams' 'Angels' because of the religious connotations. There are some really weird things that you can and can't do. Because it would be nice, if you think about it, we did our civil partnership and the Registrar was some random woman who we'd met probably six or eight weeks previously to actually go through the

> process of actually applying to do it. Whereas, having the ability to actually have somebody who *means* something to you do something, it would be lovely.

Steve reflected that though they had not converted their partnership to civil marriage, they felt 'married' and accepted in society: 'I suppose that's probably where we are in the sense of to all intents and purposes we are married. We wear rings and it's just terminology, more than anything else, isn't it?' For their son Ed, whilst Steve said Ed would like a wedding party, in practice, 'he says we're married anyway.' Having drifted away from Church over the years through moving houses and in particular through being put off by the comments made by one vicar, the only difference they experienced was when completing forms:

> I think the only thing with a civil partnership that's strange, is the terminology. We were partners before. We're still partners now. And I suppose, if there is the option of marriage, you can actually be husbands. There is a different terminology. Whereas, I'd never say, 'My civil partner and I.' It just sounds a bit – clinical. And artificial. So, it's just, 'My partner.' I think there probably is [a qualitative difference]. Because it's still not equal, is it? We are civil partners. You and [your mixed-sex spouse] couldn't be civil partners. And like on car insurance and things like that, there is a specific option to select your status as married, or civil-partnered. And named drivers – you've got a spouse, or you've got a civil partner. It's still a bit of a distinction. Probably most people don't think about it. And people probably just assume that we're married. Ed will say on occasion, 'Well, my Dads are married.' And that's that. He wouldn't say, 'They're civil-partnered.' He probably doesn't even know the meaning of that.

Celebrating with families and guests in Holy Communion

In the context where the Church of England does not permit services for same-sex couples to celebrate their unions in church or to receive a blessing from clergy, some couples within the Church of England have found that the Eucharist, the Church's service of Holy Communion, provides a religious context for a family gathering. Rob and Ben had celebrated after their civil partnership with an event in a secular space on the following day for families and guests (among them, clergy colleagues) including a service of Holy Communion. Luke and Matt had celebrated with just a few people after their civil partnership, with Holy Communion in a church side-chapel, followed by a reception in a garden for more guests. I consider Holy Communion as a context for same-sex blessings in premodern liturgies in Chapter 4.

Mutuality and fidelity within relationships in transition

Particular issues arose from three participants whose relationships were in transition. Two hoped to marry their respective long-term partners in the Church of England but could not, as same-sex couples. A further participant had married decades before but now had become a same-sex couple in law and the eyes of the Church.[130] Having hoped to remain married and to renew their wedding vows in church (which had not happened), they would now opt for civil partnership and a celebration in a secure and loving context outside the Church. They had experienced a subtle change in attitudes towards them, from being accepted in the Church as mixed-sex spouses to being outside the Church's normative boundaries as same-sex spouses.[131] To safeguard anonymity, I decided not to include representative constructions for these participants. Their narratives support the interpretations I argue in this research, that mutuality and fidelity (with optional parenting and nurture of children) underlie all 12 participants' committed relationships of marriage, civil partnership and the long-term commitment of two couples aspiring to marry in the Church.

In the following section, I explore changes in the social contexts underlying the Church's third benefit of marriage, biological complementarity with the possibility of procreation, in the light of literature and of this research within the contemporary Church of England.

The Church's third benefit of marriage: biological complementarity

The Church of England's traditional theology of marriage for mixed-sex couples rests on its normative theology that 'the intrinsic nature of marriage…is the union of a man and a woman' (Church of England, 2012, p. 3, para. 6), asserted as benefitting society through the biological complementarity of the married couple. The Church of England explained to the

[130] The impact in practice of the traditional social and legal context prior to the Marriage (Same-sex Couples) Act 2013 on couples and families where a parent transitioned in gender was the requirement of divorce. (Morris, J. (1974), *Conundrum*. London, UK. Faber & Faber Ltd.)
Jan and Elizabeth Morris became civil partners in 2008.
Millen, R. (2018). Jan Morris: 'I haven't gone from one sex to the other. I'm both.' *The Times*. 30 August 2018. Retrieved from https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/jan-morris-interview-i-haven-t-gone-from-one-sex-to-the-other-i-m-both-cpg93nkc7

[131] The Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013 provided for married couples where one had transitioned gender to remain married under civil law. Prior to December 2014, a couple was required by law to divorce after transition of gender of one spouse. (Gender Recognition Act 2004. (2014, September 1). GIRES website. Retrieved from https://www.gires.org.uk/gender-recognition-act-2004/)

UK Government that 'the uniqueness of marriage – and a further aspect of its virtuous nature – is that it embodies the underlying, objective, distinctiveness of men and women. This distinctiveness and complementarity are seen most explicitly in the biological union of man and woman which potentially brings to the relationship the fruitfulness of procreation' (Church of England, 2012, p. 3, para. 10). In this section I argue that contemporary social contexts and norms have changed, requiring re-evaluation of the Church's theology in the light of research into marriage law, gender and sexuality, and lived practice.

Peterson and McLean (2013, pp. 15-23) traced the history of attitudes to sex, gender and marriage from pre-Christian classical times, influenced by Judaism, absorbed by the Western Latin Church, until interpreted by the Church of England as arguments for marriage restricted to mixed-sex couples with 'biological complementarity' (2012). In Chapter 1, I have argued that research into gender and sexuality has challenged the 20th century theory of biological or gender complementarity for half a century. In this section, three grounds from practice challenge the theory: that consummation has not been – and is not – required for a valid marriage, control of conception has led to a profound shift in the practices of sexual relationships and procreation, and contemporary social contexts provide alternative ways to have children.

Validity of marriage: beginning and ending

Consummation and procreation

From Roman times leading into the early church, marriage was recognised in practice by declarations of the *consent* of both parties before witnesses, with the hope and expectation that *marital affection* would develop over time. This meant that consummation was not the test for marriage (Boswell, 1995, pp. 51, 118, 167, and see below, page 162). The first sexual intercourse after marriage established the new status of both spouses: the girl from virgin to woman, wife and potential mother, and the man as husband with potential heirs and authority over their joint household. The Roman social context around the couple making a legal contract of marriage was as an alliance between two families for property

and inheritance (1995, pp. 32, 51). Protection of the legitimacy of a child as heir and the bride's value as a virgin led to early marriage.[132]

For the first thousand years of the Western Latin Church, marriage remained a public contract of the state and nuptial blessings were only required for clergy (1995, pp. 162–5). The early mediaeval social context including its institutions gradually assumed a 'Christian' identity, so that life-long marriage developed over a millennium as a sacrament, without the option for divorce in the Western church. Non-consummation became an increasingly important legal ground for a marriage to be annulled, whether through incapability of the husband or the withholding before marriage of an intention not to consummate the marriage. To avoid later annulment, the custom developed to show proof of consummation after the first night of marriage, linked with a purity test for the bride before marriage, both with potentially controversial consequences if the bride was rejected as impure by either family.[133] However, consummation was not a requirement for the marriage alliance to be legal and, while non-consummation remains a basis in English law for an application for annulment of a 'voidable marriage,' the marriage is nevertheless legally valid. Because consummation is not required (as not possible) for same-sex marriage, non-consummation cannot be a ground for annulment.[134]

A mixed-sex couple in a 'platonic' marriage without consummation won a case (2018) to be joint parents of a baby carried by a surrogate. The judge ruled: 'The marriage is a marriage… A sexual relationship is not necessary for there to be a valid marriage… The law has always recognised that a couple may take each other as wife and husband [as sister and brother].'[135] In England, under civil law, sexual intercourse and consummation are *not essential* to prove a marriage, thus challenging the Church of England's acknowledgement of 'an underlying biological complementarity' (with potential for procreation) as an *essential* benefit and *intrinsic* characteristic of marriage (Church of England, 2012, p.1). Further, the legal ruling of 2018 above challenges the Church's limitation of same-sex clergy couples to civil partnership, given that under civil law, marriage does not presume

[132] Child marriage (under 18) continues around the world: there is a campaign to raise the age of marriage with parental consent in England from 16 to 18. (*Girls Not Brides.* (n. d.). Retrieved from https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/about-child-marriage/)
[133] Heath, N. (2018, January 15). *The historic tradition of wedding night-virginity testing.* Retrieved from SBS website https://www.sbs.com.au/topics/life/relationships/article/2018/01/10/historic-tradition-wedding-night-virginity-testing
[134] *Annul a marriage.* (2018). Retrieved from https://www.gov.uk/how-to-annul-marriage
[135] 'Platonic' couple can be joint parents. (2018, March 14). *The Times*. Retrieved from https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/platonic-couple-can-be-joint-parents-0kk0dhd7n

consummation and can therefore include a 'platonic' or celibate marriage. The implications of this ruling inform the dialogue in Chapter 4 with liturgies of same-sex friendship from the premodern Eastern Church (Boswell, 1995).

Remarriage after divorce and marriage at an older age also affect the possibility of procreation where the couple may have reduced fertility or be beyond childbearing age. Marriage of older people beyond childbearing age is solemnised in the Church of England, as is marriage between people who know they are unable to have children prior to the ceremony, through incapacity or infertility. The possibility of procreation is absent in such marriages without invalidating the marriage. This informs an espoused theology of marriage emerging among some participants in Chapter 3 embodying mutuality and fidelity, where parenting and the nurture of children is an optional choice within the relationship, separated from the traditional third benefit of biological complementarity asserted by the Church of England as its normative theology of marriage (2012).

Ending marriage: adultery and other grounds

Once marriage was defined by the church as life-long and indissoluble because it was a sacrament, it could only be ended through annulment.[136] Divorce to permit remarriage was limited to those who could afford a costly Private Act of Parliament, usually initiated by husbands, until a separate divorce court was set up in 1857.[137] Wives had to prove life-threatening cruelty in addition to adultery to obtain a divorce, with desertion added as a ground in addition to adultery after 1857.[138] It was expected that annulment was proved early in a marriage, so that divorce later in marriage was a rare, difficult and costly legal process involving Parliament and later the High Court in London. In England in 1969,[139] divorce became legal on the additional bases (to adultery) of: unreasonable behaviour; desertion (after two years); and two grounds without requiring proof of fault, legal

[136] The doctrine of nullity, contemporary annulment, as if the marriage had not existed. Application could be made to annul on various grounds but non-consummation did not in itself invalidate the marriage without an application. ((2018, February 2). *History of Divorce.* Retrieved from https://englishlegalhistory.wordpress.com/2018/02/02/history-of-divorce/)

[137] Separation (not divorce) was possible prior to 1937 on other grounds. (*Wedlock or deadlock.* (n. d.). Retrieved from https://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/private-lives/relationships/overview/wedlock-or-deadlock/)

[138] Only 314 Private Acts for divorce were obtained 1700-1857. (*Obtaining a divorce.* (n. d.). Retrieved from https://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/private-lives/relationships/overview/divorce/)

[139] Divorce Reform Act. Divorce was not permitted within the first three years of marriage under any grounds until 1984 when the time period was reduced to one year. (Cambridge Family Law Practice. (2012, April 18). *A brief history of divorce.* Retrieved from http://www.cflp.co.uk/a-brief-history-of-divorce/)

separation for two years with the consent of both spouses and five years without the consent of both.[140] Since the 1970s, 'unreasonable behaviour' has replaced adultery as the main grounds for divorce (by mixed-sex couples). Only applications based on adultery required proof of engagement in a sexual relationship outside the marriage. Consequently, the new bases of separation, desertion or unreasonable behaviour reduced the legal connection between sexual intercourse and the ending of a marriage further. In contemporary England, evidence of sexual intercourse as adultery to end a marriage is no longer required in law, because there are other legitimate bases for divorce. The ending of civil partnerships and same-sex civil marriages does not include the basis of adultery because these unions cannot be consummated. All unions may therefore be ended on grounds for divorce other than adultery.

To summarize, under English civil law, consummation is not required for a marriage to be valid. Adultery is no longer required as a ground for divorce. Consummation and adultery – in legal terms – require sexual intercourse between male and female. As neither are required for mixed-sex couples, there is no reason in law why same-sex couples may not marry, with divorce permitted for other reasons. I argue that this legal and social reality challenges the Church of England's retention of 'an underlying biological complementarity' as the basis of a restricted theology of mixed-sex marriage (2012), leading to proposed reforms to liturgy and policy in Chapter 4.

Divorce and step-families

The Church of England recognised divorce (1981) and permitted the marriage in church of a couple where one or both has a former spouse still living (2002) with their status recorded in the marriage registers as 'previous marriage dissolved.' An application form for couples explained that Church of England clergy are permitted by law to decline as a matter of their conscience to marry a couple where one or both has a former spouse still living, allowing clergy to hold a theology of marriage as a life-long sacrament where two people are united indissolubly.[141] Guidelines for clergy on marriage in church after divorce recommended the application form (above) to ascertain appropriate pastoral care for a former spouse and family and to ensure the second relationship was not the cause of the breakdown of the

[140] Legal reforms to divorce law in the 20th century in 1937, 1969 (when the necessity to prove fault by one spouse was removed) and 1976. (*Wedlock or deadlock.* (n. d.). Retrieved from https://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/private-lives/relationships/overview/wedlock-or-deadlock/)

[141] Church of England. (2003). *Marriage in church after divorce.* Retrieved from https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2017-11/MarriageAFTERdivorceFORM.pdf

first marriage, considered to be adultery. The parish priest was responsible for this process (with reference if necessary to the bishop of the diocese), designed to protect the church's theology of the sanctity of marriage from the routine marriage of divorced people, to provide pastoral consideration for former spouses and for children regarding financial support and parenting, and to act responsibly to pre-empt complaints or scandal (for example, if a previous family had been abandoned).[142]

The guidelines treated marriage after divorce as exceptional and only to happen once whereas, in practice, clergy are approached by couples from complex backgrounds, where one may have been divorced twice while the other has never married, but may have had long-term cohabiting partners. Both may have children from previous relationships, with a range of care and responsibility through shared or single parenting. Families care for children of different parents relating as stepchildren, or with informal peer and sibling relationships. Children may have separated parents in two households, two sets of parents or more, moving between different families with varied parenting and financial agreements. These changes in the social reality of couples approaching the Church of England for liturgies of marriage and blessing inform this research.

In summary, changes in law and practice in England have separated sexual intercourse from the legal beginning, validity and ending of a marriage. These shifts in the social context underlie evolving attitudes and emerging theologies in this research. In the next section, changes regarding contemporary choices for parenting and the nurture of children challenge the Church's assertion of an underlying biological complementarity (with the possibility of procreation), restricting the 'understanding of marriage as a lifelong union between one man and one woman' (Church of England, 2012, p. 2, para. 2).

Procreation, marriage and children

Contraception

The introduction of artificial methods of contraception and their subsequent widespread availability have been a significant factor changing practice and attitudes towards procreation in the past half-century.[143] Government data show the rise of childbirth after

[142]House of Bishops. (2002). *Marriage in church after divorce.* Retrieved from http://www.facultyoffice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Divorce-HoB-Advice.pdf

[143] Family Planning Clinics provided the contraceptive pill from 1967. The National Health Service (NHS) prescribed artificial contraception from 1974. The Abortion Act 1967 also contributed to a

wartime and fall after contraception became available through the NHS (1974), in particular to teenaged mothers.[144] The Church of England disapproved of artificial contraception in 1908 but by 1930 accepted methods of birth control when there were ethical grounds, before concluding that it was a matter for parents' consciences in 1958.[145] By accepting the disconnection of sexual intercourse from biological procreation on pastoral and ethical grounds, I argue that the Church's third asserted (2012) benefit of traditional marriage became qualified rather than essential. Artificial contraception led to a revolution in choices, lifestyles and attitudes for couples, leading to my argument in this research that the asserted benefit of biological complementarity is challenged as an underlying assumption in the Church's normative theology of marriage (2012), from practice and from academic research into gender and sexuality. Participants' primary pastoral concern was the consequent refusal by the Church of England of blessing for same-sex couples after civil unions, given that mixed-sex couples can have a service after civil marriage. To reform the Church's prohibition of blessing and enable a pastoral welcome for same-sex couples after civil unions, I argue that challenges to the theory of biological or gender complementarity are key to answering my research question, so that equal marriage and partnership can be explored further through liturgy and practice (Chapter 4).

Couples' individual or joint choice to use artificial contraception enabled responsible sexual intercourse, protecting from the risk of pregnancy and the social, practical and economic impacts of multiple unplanned children. Contraception enabled couples (and individuals) to exercise choices about parenting within a sexually intimate relationship. Women could limit their fertility and manage their health and welfare to achieve higher education and training, gradually combining child care with working outside the home (as employment law was reformed).[146] Couples could choose to delay starting a family, leading to a greater joint

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reduction in childbirth (not enacted for Northern Ireland). (Manchester Metropolitan University. (n. d.). *The women's timeline.* Retrieved from https://www.mmu.ac.uk/equality-and-diversity/doc/gender-equality-timeline.pdf)

[144] Haines, N. (2018). *Births in England and Wales: 2017*. Para 4. Figure 1: Number of live births and total fertility rate (TFR), 1938 to 2017. Retrieved from https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/livebirths/bulletins/birthsummarytablesenglandandwales/2017#two-thirds-of-babies-born-outside-marriage-or-civil-partnership-had-parents-who-live-together

[145] (2009). *Contraception.* Retrieved from BBC. http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/christianity/christianethics/contraception_1.shtml#h4BBC

[146] Through parish practice I am aware that these changes affected families in different ways, for example, where extended families remained in nearby communities, inter-generational childcare meant that young mothers might work out of the home while grandparents provided considerable childcare. This gradually changed as the retirement age rose. Informal arrangements for childcare were gradually supplemented by limited provision of nursery care. (Family Rights Group. (n. d.). *Early*

earning capacity to set up a household. Couples choosing to have children limited the number of offspring (apart from multiple births conceived naturally) and the closeness of birth, so that the fertility rate for a woman of 1.76 children (2017)[147] decreased from 2.9 (1964) after contraception and abortion became widely available in the late 1960s.[148] The average age of motherhood rose to 30.4 years (2016)[149] and the number of teenaged pregnancies fell.[150] These changes in lifestyle due to new social norms providing choices through artificial contraception (and abortion) have, I argue, eroded the Church of England's normative theology of sexual intercourse and biological procreation in marriage over the past 50 years, because sexual intercourse is separated from procreation in contemporary law and practice.

Choosing to be child free

This separation – of sexual intercourse from conception – enabled couples in committed relationships to choose intentionally not to have children. Four participants in this research had chosen not to have children: one couple had married young and chosen to remain child-free; another couple were civil-partnered in mid-life and considered themselves beyond the child-rearing phase by the time it was legally possible for same-sex couples to adopt; and a third participant had chosen not to have children but on marriage became a step-parent of adult offspring and step-grandparent. The fourth participant had also chosen not to have children but would acquire adult step-children if the couple legalised their long-term relationship in marriage. Artificial contraception led to a reduction in any stigma in the past associated with 'childlessness' from assumptions of infertility, given that a couple may

years and pre-school education. Retrieved from https://www.frg.org.uk/early-years-and-pre-school-education/)
However, couples in lower income employment, training, or working part-time, were less able to afford this prior to school age. Child care in England remains a conflicted area. (Matthews, D. (2017, February 21). *Preschool, nanny, parental care, daycare? What's best?* Retrieved from https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/going-beyond-intelligence/201702/preschool-nanny-parental-care-daycare-what-s-best)

[147] Office for National Statistics (ONS.). (2018). *Births in England and Wales: 2017.* Retrieved from https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/livebirths/bulletins/birthsummarytablesenglandandwales/2017

[148] (2018). *Total fertility rate 1938–2014 England and Wales.* Retrieved from CLOSER. https://www.closer.ac.uk/data/total-fertility-rate/

[149] ONS. (2017). *Births by parents' characteristics in England and Wales: 2016.* Retrieved from https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/livebirths/bulletins/birthsbyparentscharacteristicsinenglandandwales/2016

[150] ONS. (2016). *Live births: age specific fertility rates for England and Wales, 1938 to 2015.* Retrieved from https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/conceptionandfertilityrates/adhocs/005911livebirthsagespecificfertilityratesforenglandandwales1938to2015

have chosen not to have children for many reasons, from concern about genetic inheritance of diseases to responsible population control. By 2017, 18% of women (born 1972) had not had children compared with 10% born a generation earlier (1945).[151]

Sexual intimacy apart from procreation

A further impact in practice of choices for couples about whether and when to have children is their enjoyment of sexual intimacy within their relationship of mutuality and fidelity, separate from conception. Control of conception without risk of pregnancy led to shared sexual intimacy as part of the couple's early relationship, usually with a decision to cohabit before legalising the relationship. For same-sex couples, artificial contraceptive barrier methods to prevent infectious disease enabled couples to enjoy reduced-risk intimacy, in a changing social context where same-sex monogamy in a committed lifelong union became recognised as a valid, public, legal option.

These gradual changes in practice to separate sexual intimacy from procreation freed couples to enjoy 'the delight and tenderness of sexual union and joyful commitment to the end of their lives' (Church of England, 2000, p. 105) in ways not limited to biological intercourse for procreation. Freed by using contraception from fear of unwanted pregnancy or transmitted diseases,[152] couples experienced mutuality and fidelity between two people in nuanced ways of embodied intimacy beyond (whilst for some, including) the possibility for procreation. In Chapter 4, I propose reform to celebrate espoused meanings of equal marriage and of blessing, in revised liturgies.

Fostering and adoption

Couples requiring an heir (or individuals) have formed families through legal adoption and legacy in different eras and social contexts. In the premodern era of Roman law, adoption was a similar business contract to a marriage alliance, based on the commercial law of partnerships. Adoption of a child or a brother in Roman law required a declaration before witnesses with the adoptee present, granting a claim of inheritance in an established legal relationship (Boswell, 1995, pp. 98–9). Since 1927 in England,[153] laws for adoption and

[151] ONS. (2018). *Childbearing for women born in different years, England and Wales: 2017.* Retrieved from https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/conceptionandfertilityrates/bulletins/childbearingforwomenbornindifferentyearsenglandandwales/2017

[152] The Well Project. (2018, July 12). *Birth control and HIV.* Retrieved from https://www.thewellproject.org/hiv-information/birth-control-and-hiv

[153] Government. (2018, June 15). *Make a claim to a deceased person's estate: Adoptions.* Retrieved from https://www.gov.uk/guidance/make-a-claim-to-a-deceased-persons-estate#adoptions

fostering have protected under-age children with state scrutiny of the parent(s) and their home before they can form a family.[154] Step-children or children of a partner may be adopted to deepen their connection in law. Two participants in this research had, with their spouse or partner, adopted children and one further participant and partner had fostered a child. English law was enacted in 2002 for same-sex couples to adopt from 2005.[155] The priority of the welfare of children continues to require stable parent(s) in loving homes: mixed- and same-sex couples as well as single parents may apply to adopt.

Changing social and medical contexts

Assisted conception, donors and surrogacy

Although couples can prevent conception through artificial methods and are free to enjoy their sexual relationship, there is no guarantee that sexual intercourse will lead inevitably to conception due to age, health, fertility and other reasons. The pastoral context of this research in parish practice recognises the sadness of people who are unable to have children and does not therefore assume that children are a commodity to be chosen. A further change in the social context is the increasing range of medical interventions to assist conception, through fertility treatment including in-vitro fertilisation (IVF). These advances in understanding and enabling conception offer couples choices not only to prevent conception but to obtain assistance to conceive. The use of IVF breaks the link between the procreating act of sexual intercourse and conception, in practice. The Church of England engaged with consultation on assisted conception and research, supported IVF and accepted embryo research in the first 14 days.[156]

The legal involvement of a third party to assist conception through donation of eggs or sperm, and childbearing through surrogacy,[157] has further extended the possibilities for a couple to have children biologically, of one or both of them, including pregnancy for older

[154] Government. (n. d.). *Child adoption.* Retrieved from https://www.gov.uk/child-adoption
[155] Current legislation. (Government. (n. d.). *Child adoption.* Retrieved from https://www.gov.uk/child-adoption)
Date of law change. (*Same-sex adoption in the UK.* (n. d.). Retrieved from Pink Parents. http://www.pinkparents.org.uk/same-sex-adoption-in-the-uk.html)
[156] *Christian perspectives*. (n. d.). Retrieved from rsrevision.com. http://www.rsrevision.com/GCSE/christian_perspectives/life/infertility/church.htm
[157] *Surrogacy: legal rights of parents and surrogates.* (n. d.). Retrieved from https://www.gov.uk/legal-rights-when-using-surrogates-and-donors

women.[158] These options remove the procreation of the child further from the act of sexual intercourse between the biological or legal parents.[159]

Informal alternatives

In practice, couples and individuals can decide whether to conceive a child in many ways outside legal or cohabiting relationships by making arrangement with a friend,[160] a relative of one's partner or by paying a stranger (through an agency) as a donor. One biological parent may choose to have primary responsibility as a single parent; or both may choose to share parental responsibility but live in different households; or adoptive parents (or one biological parent and one adoptive) may acquire legal parental responsibility with the consent of the biological parent; both biological parents may have other partners or spouses and live in different houses, with the child moving between households with two sets of parents or one pair and a single parent. Pete, a participant in this research, was in a long-term relationship with Simon. Pete was biological father of Mark with joint parental responsibility shared with Mark's mother, who was also in a same-sex relationship. Pete reflected on Mark's attitude to having two dads and two mums, with two homes.

> [Being normal] is the overriding sense. Absolutely. Yes. [And other people's labels are just] other people's labels. In fact, I'd go even further than that. I'd go as far as to say that he's actually proud that he has this kind of family dynamic. It's not just *normal*, I think he's actually *quite proud*.

In practice, contemporary individuals and same-sex couples are choosing to have children not only through adoption or fostering, but through informal and formal arrangements for biological procreation with someone who is not their partner or spouse. This amicable form of biological procreation is outside the Church of England's normative definition of parenting within marriage because the arrangement is not between two spouses. However, these varied families are within the wider Church of England and are fully accepted in the

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[158] Moorhead, J. (2018, August 21). The surprising truth about becoming a mother in your 50s – from the women who know. *The Guardian.* Retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2018/aug/21/becoming-mother-in-50s-number-births-soaring

[159] ONS. (2018). *Live births to mothers aged 45 and over, 2001 to 2016.* Retrieved from https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/livebirths/adhocs/008545livebirthstomothersaged45andover2001to2016#main
The Church of England expressed concerns about offering fertility treatment to single people and same-sex couples. (*Christian perspectives*. (n. d.). Retrieved from rsrevision.com. http://www.rsrevision.com/GCSE/christian_perspectives/life/infertility/church.htm)

[160] *Surrogacy through friendship*. (n. d.). Retrieved from Surrogacy UK. https://surrogacyuk.org/

contemporary social context, not only without stigma for children who may have one or multiple parents, but with the child's sense of pride.

Implications of changes in practice and law for the Church's assertion of biological complementarity as essential to marriage

This research recognises the separation in law of sexual intercourse from conception, from consummation early in a marriage, and from adultery to end a marriage. In addition to having children through sexual intercourse between a fertile mixed-sex couple, there are choices for the possibility of parenting in a variety of other ways. All may choose to take preventative action to remain child free.

In this research, four participants had chosen not to have children while eight participants had children through different routes: both of the couple as biological parents (four participants); one of the couple as the biological parent (one); adoptive parent (two); or foster parent (one).[161] Participants with children lived with their spouse or partner in vicarages and private households, fully accepted within their communities regardless of the gender and sexuality of the parents. On marriage later in life, two further participants had (or would have, on legalising their long-term relationship) adult step-children in independent households, with grandchildren. All research participants expressed their views that having children or not should be optional for couples in traditional mixed-sex marriage.

In the next chapter, I explore espoused theologies of marriage, parenting and family life in the light of participants' consensus affirming two benefits of marriage in the Church of England, mutuality and fidelity, but with two options interpreting the benefit asserted by the Church, of biological complementarity. These are: either an espoused, normative theology assuming biological complementarity with procreation (therefore mixed-sex marriage) with optional parenting and nurture of children; or with espoused theologies that reject the Church's normative theology that assumes biological complementarity (2012) (therefore open to marriage beyond heteronormative boundaries) to explore a wider range of options for parenting and the nurture of children. These two interpretations of biological complementarity as a benefit of marriage converged in pastoral practice, where participants sought to accept and include single people, child-free couples, parents and

[161] See Figure 1, p. 57.

families in Church regardless of how, and whether, they had children. This pastoral theology of welcome resonates with Christian incorporation into the family of the Church through baptism and Holy Communion, considered further in Chapter 4.

Chapter 3

Espoused theologies of marriage and parenting interpreted in this research

Introduction

In this chapter, my research develops a detailed interpretation of participants' diverse espoused theologies of human relationship in committed unions. Through representative constructions (interpreted from co-constructed narratives generated by interviews) I explore participants' exercise of responsible choices for children or to remain child-free, the joy of parenting beyond heteronormative families and the expression of marriage and partnership as 'pro/creative' relationships. This leads to my proposal for a reinterpretation of the Church's third benefit of marriage to 'responsible choices for parenting and the nurture of children.'

Sarah offered her wider sense of the third benefit of marriage, based on her (operant) experience as a single person without children until mid-life, then marriage with adult step-families. Her espoused theology reinterpreted procreation, 'I certainly don't think that marriage is even primarily about procreation in the biological sense. I think it's *a procreative relationship in all kinds of other ways and that two together can be more creative than one*' (emphasis added). In this chapter, participants' espoused theologies offer evidence of what I will term 'pro/creative' relationships, where parenting includes but is wider than biological procreation, and where couples can be creative beyond procreation and nurture of their own children, including within the baptismal family of the Church. A pro/creative relationship, in this research, develops Sarah's espoused theology of 'all kinds of other ways' of spouses being creative, and 'that two together can be more creative than one.'

I have argued in the preceding chapters that the changing social, legal and academic contexts in research and practice challenge binary theories of biological or gender complementarity. I have asserted, because the second part of the third benefit – the possibility of procreation – is already optional, that couples can choose to be child-free or have children in ways other than biological procreation between the couple, so that having children naturally together is within a wider contemporary understanding and practice of family life and the nurture of children. The emphasis of this research shifts among the three benefits of marriage by affirming and reforming the first two benefits, mutuality and

fidelity, to embrace parenting and the nurture of children as within a range of joyful expression of the couple's pro/creative relationship. Reframing the third benefit of marriage as *responsible choices for parenting and the nurture of children r*ecognises that, in practice in the contemporary social context in England, families are varied, diverse and complex. In addition, by reinterpreting the third benefit to a wider pro/creative relationship, people who are child-free and who are parents through different paths all embody meanings of marriage and partnership as expressions of Christian unions of harmony and peace. In Chapter 4, I consider liturgies to express such unions founded on mutuality and fidelity with responsible choice for parenting, in a pro/creative relationship.

Same-sex couples whose relationships parallel marriage in practice – and may have children – approach the Church in the contemporary era for blessing after civil unions, while some express a desire to marry in church. Pete hoped to marry in church but did not realise that as a same-sex couple they could not under English law (because of the quadruple lock with exemption for the Church of England):

> My ideal ceremony would be… I can tell you exactly what it would be – it would be in the chapel at the [countryside beauty spot]. With a vicar, and myself and Simon, and [my son]. Our mums, and *perhaps* a few family. And it would include the [registration] as well as the canon bits, the religious bits. That's what it would be.

Pete and Simon had been together for 15 years and were regular worshippers in the Church of England, yet did not know (in 2016 at interview) that they could not marry in church. This typifies enquiries from same-sex couples to parish clergy. The changing context argued in earlier chapters raises urgent pastoral and theological grounds for the Church of England to consider a change of policy to provide a liturgy for couples to celebrate in church after civil unions. In Chapter 4, in addition to reform to the Church's liturgy to enable mixed-sex couples to celebrate equal marriage between them, I propose the introduction of a service in church with prayer for God's blessing for couples after civil unions to celebrate their relationships of mutuality and fidelity, with responsible choices for parenting. I signpost that reframing marriage and partnership as Christian unions of harmony and peace (Chapter 4) opens a possibility for an inclusive normative theology of Christian marriage, with a parallel theology of Christian partnership, for mixed-sex and same-sex couples, to express and test through practice in liturgy.

Operant theologies from the previous chapter led to my interpretation of participants' espoused theologies in this chapter. For this research I sampled intentionally for diversity in

participants' own relationships, with the expectation that each participant's operant practice and espoused theology would express particular contextualised meanings arising from their unique union as a couple within the Church of England. This variety and range complexifies (Swinton & Mowat, 2006, p. 13) the research into meanings of equal marriage and offers rich, nuanced, detailed evidence of emerging espoused theologies based on operant practice. In this chapter, I group representative constructions into two themes: five participants espoused theologies of equality within mixed-sex marriage in church, with an operant pastoral approach to welcome couples in same-sex unions; while seven participants espoused emerging theologies of equal marriage regardless of gender and sexuality in church. All 12 participants espoused pastoral theologies of welcome and prayer for God's blessing that would, if permitted, include same-sex couples in committed unions of civil partnership and marriage. Some of the participants who were parish clergy had prayed in private with same-sex couples. Most remained within the Church's official requirement not to bless same-sex unions and did not provide a ceremony with blessing in church.

Representative constructions: 'thought poems'

Representative constructions continue from the previous chapter with an additional format, to express the quality of poetry and prayer in participants' hesitant bringing-into-voice of deeper meanings. Walton discussed theologians who use poetic language to express 'something closer to a revelation or epiphany' (2007, pp. 56–59). Slee explained that for her,

> the sound of poetry is extremely important and I often *hear* the first line of a new poem, as if spoken to me from another source (although it is, of course, my own self speaking); the sound of the line leads me into the whole poem, often without any conscious sense of what it is I am writing until after I have written it (2014, p. 11, emphasis original).

During interviews, I interpreted that some participants moved into a form and pace of speaking that resonated with poetic language and Slee's description (above). After *hearing* something they had voiced perhaps for the first time, the quality of their speech became halting and tentative, an almost-poetic exploration of what they believed. This occurred in co-constructed narratives conducted through a person-centred approach (Rogers, 1986, pp. 135-137) where the listener-researcher pays careful attention to hold silences, reflect back content without interjecting rational argument, with open prompts offered (only if needed)

to enable the person to connect with 'a deeper source than the conscious self' (Slee, 2014, p. 11). The co-constructed narratives became, I argue, oral accounts of participant's lives as 'texts' (Ganzevoort, 2012, pp. 215-216) with the poetics of practice, and of testimony (Walton, 2012, pp. 177-181). As I reflected and interpreted how a written text can express meanings as well as the verbal content, I tested representative constructions in this format for the response of the reader (Czarniawaska (2004), in Bold, 2012, pp. 144–6).[162]

Slee asserted that 'any poem that can be translated into prose terms without loss, is hardly a poem worthy of the name,' with a sense of mystery as to why some people respond and others do not (2014, p. 12). I formatted representative constructions as affective language by using new lines for pauses and two new lines for silences. Short phrases read down a page as a 'thought poem.' I propose that the 'thought poems' in this chapter would lose affective content and hence some meaning if they were set out in prose. To express the deeper meaning in the participant's own voice, I have not added or removed words unless an ellipsis symbol (…) is shown. In Chapter 4, I include a longer representative construction which achieved a quality of spoken liturgical form when voiced during interview without interruption or prompting (page 149).

The two strands I interpreted from my data of nuanced espoused theologies of marriage, partnership and blessing are explored in the following two sections, seeking meanings of equal marriage within the Church of England.

Espoused theologies of equal marriage (mixed-sex) with operant theologies of pastoral care, and blessing for same-sex couples

Five participants expressed concerns about whether same-sex unions should be understood and celebrated as 'marriage' within the Church of England. Three participants, David, Fiona and Steph, voiced operant theologies of inclusive, compassionate practice revealing an underlying tension with their espoused normative theologies of marriage that retained a binary gender essentialism. Whilst expressing concerns about same-sex parenting, all offered pastoral care for same-sex couples in their ministerial roles in practice as clergy.

[162] With my doctoral peer group in January 2018, asking if they as readers identified with positives and negatives in the texts, in relation to their own experience, as a criterion of credibility.

Narratives of pastoral encounters showed care for the couple (operant) held in parallel with the participants' doubts and questions about same-sex unions as marriage (espoused).

David responded with profound concern to a question about same-sex couples in civil unions within the church wanting 'to create a family in some way:'

> I am hugely exercised by this. I don't have a problem with them creating a family, ah, do I? Perhaps I'm not being honest there. Let me start again. I *am* greatly exercised [] and I think, I [] deeply, deeply hoped, still wish, though late in the day, that the Church had at the time, and can still, acknowledge civil partnership where there is faithful, mutual, loving relationship.

David clarified his thinking, making a distinction between civil partnership between a couple and same-sex civil marriage:[163]

> I feel that marriage has been diminished, if I put it that strongly by, same-sex marriage. I'm content with civil partnership, well I'm content with *all* the rights and responsibilities that go with that, be equal to marriage. But it seems to me that all those who hold a view that the marriage is historically, up to now, the relationship of man and woman, which includes procreation, includes family, something has been taken away from me because of this legislation. That is interpreted of course, in the common mind, the general mind, as being anti-gay, being homophobic. I think my record on that is unblemished [laughing] I [] yes, just leave it at that. It is unblemished. And in my dealings with those who are gay or lesbian, I have never felt that they were in any way inferior or indeed that they were doing anything that was wrong. Because I think of mutual respect and commitment and faith. I think that is the most wonderful thing.

He responded, to clarify further, that his concern was not with civil partnership, but with same-sex couples having children because of the implications for his traditional, espoused, normative theology of marriage and family life based on procreation (and thus, gender essentialism). As he spoke, David also recognised that time was gradually blurring gender differences and might eventually enable him to adjust.

> I mean, I think we have a [long pause] I think by, by definition, the [] the partnership relationship of two people of the same-sex, it must by definition be different from that of a man and woman. Which is partly to do with the creation, partly to do with

[163] The interview was less than a year after the first civil marriages for same-sex couples.

> the differences that there are which – those differences have become blurred and therefore, you know, who knows whether we have this interview in ten years', twenty years' time? Unlikely [laughing][164] – but one would have adjusted to it or come to a, you know, a compromise in my thinking. But I am deeply uneasy about what it is doing, what it has done to, to society, where norms are simply being rubbed out.

Earlier in the interview, David had expressed the influence of academic research on his sense of equality in practice in his own marriage and his espoused theology of equality in marriage (mixed-sex):

> It did seem to me that it is very important that we do understand what has happened in the behavioural sciences in the last 50 years, let alone the scientific things that have happened. And one of those is to do with the gradual equalisation of the sexes, of male and female.

David's espoused theology of equal marriage was between mixed-sex spouses, accompanied by his full acceptance of civil partnership for same-sex couples 'equal to marriage' in terms of rights and responsibilities. However, David's acceptance of civil partnership as 'equal to marriage' did not appear to accept rights for same-sex couples to have children, although this had become legal through adoption ten years earlier. His concern with same-sex marriage assumed that children were part of 'marriage' and hence his concern about the implications for family life. There was a gap between these aspects of David's espoused theology of committed relationships: although he considered civil partnership to be equal to marriage, he did not espouse a theology of equal marriage regardless of gender and sexuality. The gap stemmed from his enduring espoused, normative theology of marriage between one man and one woman where the possibility of procreation was essential to 'marriage' and mixed-sex parenting was assumed to be the optimum context for family life.

In pastoral practice, David had clearly recognised meanings in parallel with marriage in committed relationships of same-sex couples (without children), long before civil partnerships became legal:

> They both came to church occasionally. And, you know, I used to go and have a chat and we got on incredibly well. And then, one of the partners fell ill, and it was AIDS.

[164] David had already been retired for 15 years, so was referring to his age.

> And, at a time when AIDS was – you whispered it, or you didn't believe it anyway. And he died. And, St Saviour's was filled with the gay community from [miles around]. It was a wedding in the sense that that was the undertone, and it was: *The king of love my shepherd is; Praise my soul the king of heaven; The Lord's my shepherd*; and [] somebody did a short homily, and it was their mutual love, and how this had come to an end. It was beautiful but it was harrowing.

David's operant theology recognised love where he found it, with God's presence in the love shared. David expressed his 'longing' for the Church to provide a liturgy to celebrate same-sex civil partnerships in church, brought into the conversation in Chapter 4.

Fiona and John's experience of adopting children gave her insights into the desires of other couples to have a family. She expressed an espoused, normative theology of mixed-sex parents with an ideal of biological procreation, tempered by her experience of not having their own children for 13 years before adopting. Fiona recognised there was a tension between ideal and reality in practice, with her keen pastoral and experiential understanding of people 'falling short' of ideals:

> Yes, but I would [] I would [] say, hm, again, this is probably – I – the – ideally… well if you're talking about [] two men or two women, being able to adopt or get married, I'm not sure whether that's – that to me is – nobody's perfect and that to me is not God's ideal. But we all fall short. And so who are we to judge? But the ideal surely, for procreation and everything, has got to be, one man, one woman and family. That must be God's ideal. Otherwise, it wouldn't work at all would it? I mean, the mark bit of creation wouldn't carry on, so, but we all fall short. And that's just one of God's ideals. But we don't always hit the mark.

Fiona explored her espoused and operant theologies of parenting further, making her own comments on what she found herself expressing, questioning her assumptions.

> I do feel – this is going to sound awful isn't it? – I would feel for [], a husband and wife, or partners [] who couldn't have children. [] And – this is very difficult because I do know a lot of [] civil partnership couples – it would never actually strike me [] that having a family was important to them – it might be, now I'm thinking about it. I mean, I know people do, famous people – Elton John etc., to make their sort of life complete. But the people I know, I don't think that's part of their togetherness. Might be wrong, might I? Yeah. [] Whether they're complete on their own, I don't know. Right, not thought about that before.

She realised she was feeling strongly within herself the tension between operant and normative theologies and focused her thinking before answering her own questions pastorally:

> And the, the burning question is, 'What is the difference between heterosexual marriage and that [same-sex] marriage? And is that a marriage?' And the questions that are coming and I'm answering – the more I answer, the more, there's not a lot of the same as answers would be, if it was two people of the same-sex. [] But the way I'm answering actually, and yet, deep down, I don't think that is [] what is intended, but there again we're all, we fall short of, and I think that is falling short of the relationship that God intends. But people should not be hurt because of that.

Fiona prioritised pastoral care in her encounters with people in practice (operant theology) feeling that 'people should not be hurt' because of falling short of an ideal (normative theology). She recognised the tension between compassion in her practice with couples and holding to her espoused normative theology of mixed-sex marriage and parenting. She also critiqued the tensions within the wider Church of England context and the pastoral problems caused by prohibiting blessing for same-sex couples.

> It's squaring that, which is always going to be difficult. [] And [] ah [] the Church itself, well there's a lot of same-sex relationships within the Church, and it's quite open, so it's being hypocritical in that sense if it then starts not blessing, or marrying, when it's there for all to see. [] I don't know. [] But I think some people would find it very difficult if that was the Church's [] the default position. I think, I would find it difficult if it was the Church's default position. But, there's room for [] compassion and sympathy and everything else that goes with it. And it's just working that out, isn't it? Yeah. [] Mm. [] It's probably your upbringing as well, that brings you [] makes it difficult for something like this.

Later, Fiona reflected on the tension between ideal and practice in the light of the gospel and the attitudes of religious leaders and people, both in Jesus's time and in the contemporary Church:

> But the actual gospel and the way we live it out shouldn't be legalistic... Well, it's the whole thing of the Pharisees keeping to law, you know, or creating laws, creating laws to keep… which [] the Church is probably guilty of, down the centuries – well it is guilty of, creating, creating laws for-the-sake-of. Whereas, [] we've got to have laws, the Ten Commandments if you will. But, 'to love God and love your

> neighbour'[165] is the overriding one. So in that sense, that *is* legalistic isn't it? Because that is the law, that is the gospel law. But to [] dot I's and cross T's, is not what I, in my humble opinion, think what the gospel is. It's not about that.

Fiona concluded that Jesus' overarching message was about love, fulfilling law:

> That if the way of love was the ideal, which we all fall short of, but if we strive for them, then [] the world and everything would be a lot better place for everybody to be in. And that's the ideal.

Her operant inclusive pastoral theology was illustrated by narratives of encounters when couples were turned away by the incumbent of the parishes where she was an assistant priest. These stories: of a couple together for many years seeking marriage after divorce, a church-going same-sex couple seeking a blessing, and a further same-sex couple asking for their child to be baptised, showed her practice of compassion, in conflict with a strong normative theology of marriage held by the vicar as the 'church policy,' and also in tension with Fiona's own espoused normative theology of mixed-sex marriage voiced earlier in the interview. In each case, Fiona expressed that she would have agreed to officiate, at the marriage, with prayers for the same-sex couple, and with the baptism of the child.

Towards the end of the interview, Fiona summarised the tensions she was feeling between her espoused normative theology of marriage and parenting and her operant practice:

> So it is very difficult, because even given what I have been saying about [] what God's purpose is [] which ideally would be man, woman, married, procreate, give and take – whatever – [] you can see more loving relationships outside of that ideal than you can with the ideal. In lots of instances. So then you're left with – well what? What is God's intention then? [] … So it's, it [] if it's always been there, part of creation, which up until quite recently has been brushed under the carpet as if it didn't exist – because people are different and each one's made in the image of God, whatever that is. So [] but we are – all have the potential, we all have that potential to be more God-like. But as we don't know actually what God is like, [laughing] it makes life rather difficult, doesn't it?

Fiona's recognition of loving, committed relationships outside the normative theology of mixed-sex marriage and parenting and her espoused theology that all have 'potential to be more God-like' raised questions, about meanings of being 'made in the image of God'

[165] Luke 10.27.

(Genesis 1.26-28) and her interpretation of difference being 'part of creation.' This identifies a theological problem at the heart of the Church's normative theology of marriage and parenting addressed in Chapter 1, where traditional understandings of humanity made 'in the image of God' as 'part of creation' in binary gender and sexuality and as heteronormative in marriage are challenged from research literature, and in Chapter 2 by arguments from changes in legal, social and pastoral practice. This theology of creation, and renewal in Christ through baptism, is brought into dialogue in Chapter 4.

Steph began her reflection on the Church's third benefit of marriage by thinking about stability for children in family life, noting that before divorce became prevalent, children were often considered the couple's priority:

> Ah, it is a given, isn't it? [] It's [] I can [] still, I still believe that [] if at all possible, the *best* for children – the best, and I know [] we can't give the best – is a stable family. Preferably one male and one female, but we have – as far as I'm concerned, for other same-sex [] – you know, two men, two women bringing up children – the jury's still out on how that's going to be. Because we've got to see these children as they emerge through their teenage years and as adults. And I'm not here to judge or make any comment on that, but – so, where I stand [] my understanding, what's best, the best, if possible [] male/female – that sort of stable relationship can help children. So yes, procreation is within that. [] And you see this – the 1980s – [] the divorce revolution [long pause] was only really just beginning to get going. Wasn't it?

Steph reflected further on biological procreation, recognising that not all couples are fertile and that couples can choose not to have children (through contraception). She expressed an awareness in her context that 'some people' disapprove of choice:

> Because I don't think anybody should be excluded [from marriage] because of that [infertility, older age]. If – or if couples [] they don't want children. [] That's their right, to make that decision []. And [] I know it's frowned upon by some people. []

Steph's espoused theology of mixed-sex marriage did not depend on the procreation of children, but based her preference for mixed-sex parents on seeking the best, stable relationship for their children. She reflected aloud on family life and parenting, beginning her halting reflexive dialogue between operant practice and an espoused normative theology of 'stable family life' with a cautionary stance:

I have no right to stand in a position of judgement.
Whatsoever.

What is stable family life?
and that's where the whole thing is blown apart isn't it?
and
we have to be careful that we don't become judgemental.
and

hey
come on

let's
we've got to run with this because this is life
this is society.
Whether we get

hang on a minute

whether we're going to get rounded adults

well let's look at this

laughing

how rounded are the people
that have been brought up
with a man and woman and

laughing

in the sort of

?

Steph's reflection deepened, interrogating her traditional attitudes to human being and relationships in the light of her understanding of her Christian faith:

What is normal?

and who am I?
to press my

just isn't black and white
and once you make that statement

and you take the blinkers off
and the grey starts to flood in

but yet
as

as the grey floods in
if you've got the flickering light of Christ
in the centre of it

illuminating that greyness

doesn't send it back to being black and white
but it helps to illumine

I don't know

the flickering.

There's sort of an image there, isn't there?
or in my head there is

of that light
of that love
that consistency of God

over everybody
whatever

we are made in the image of God
that image of God
no matter what messes

it's there
in everybody

and who?
Yeah.

Steph sensed a movement from a binary, 'black and white' way of thinking or understanding to a 'greyness', with 'the flickering light of Christ in the centre of it' expressing provisionality and ambiguity by 'the flickering.' She visualised the illuminating, flickering light of Christ (rather than an analogy with a laser beam or spotlight for clear illumination), along with the love and consistency of God, making connections with her understanding of human identity as made in the image of God, 'it's there, in everybody.' Steph held three strands in tension: her inclusive espoused theology of human identity before God; her espoused normative theology of mixed-sex marriage and parenting; and her recognition of operant practice grounded in reality, 'no matter what messes.' This formed her attitude to the Church's prohibition of blessing for same-sex couples: that in practice clergy should not refuse God's blessing for a committed loving couple seeking affirmation and recognition.

Tensions between practice and espoused normative theologies of marriage

In this section, all three married participants who expressed concerns about same-sex union in marriage and parenting identified a pastoral espoused theology of God's love within and between everyone as 'made in the image of God' (Genesis 1.26–28). They recognised within themselves a tension between welcoming couples in practice and their espoused normative theology of only mixed-sex marriage and parenting. David expressed his awareness of the tension between practice and normative theology:

> Where, you know, *Ubi caritas* –, you know, 'where there is love, then God is present.' I, I really do believe that. And it can be between two men, as between two women. You may say that I'm therefore illogical, well I'm happy to be illogical at the moment.

David's sense of being 'illogical' encapsulates the theological problem experienced when pastoral clergy discern God's presence with and between same-sex couples in their parish practice who seek marriage, whilst espousing a traditional normative theology of marriage and parenting. The phrase *'ubi caritas'* from a Taizé chant[166] resonates both with a verse used at the beginning of the Common Worship marriage service, 'God is love, and those who live in love live in God and God lives in them' (1 John 4.16) and with narratives from pastoral practice by Steph, Fiona and David. The use of Bible readings in liturgies for marriage and union in church is considered in Chapter 4.

Fiona, Steph and David all expressed espoused normative theologies of mixed-sex marriage and parenting in tension with pastoral acceptance and care for people in same-sex relationships and civil partnerships, and same-sex parents. Their normative theologies of marriage strongly included operant and espoused theologies of equality between mixed-sex spouses. In answer to my research question, exploring the meaning of equal marriage in the Church of England, these three participants held espoused theologies of *equal marriage between mixed-sex couples*, working out equality within their own marriages and aspiring to balanced, equal relationships beyond a traditional male priority. They recognised tensions arising from their pastoral practice with same-sex couples, questioning whether

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[166] *Ubi Caritas*. (n. d.). Retrieved from https://hymnary.org/text/ubi_caritas_et_amor

The Taizé title refers to Latin words from the 9th century. (Martin, M. (n. d.). *Ubi caritas.* Retrieved from http://www.preces-latinae.org/thesaurus/Hymni/UbiCaritas.html)
Latin translated: 'Where charity and love are, God is there,' not the English language Taizé version.

same-sex unions are or should be understood as 'marriage' and, if so, celebrated in church. All three expressed a willingness to bless same-sex couples after civil unions, informing my proposals for reform in Chapter 4.

Two further participants, Luke and Kate, espoused a theology of equal partnership separate from marriage because they regarded marriage as a heteronormative institution (particularly in the Church), hierarchical and historically unequal. This view was addressed in Chapter 2 and is taken into conversation in Chapter 4.

Emerging espoused theologies of equal marriage and blessing for mixed- and same-sex couples, with parenting

In this section three married participants, Jen, Sarah and Rick, narrate their espoused theologies of equal marriage between two people, beyond traditional normative theologies that limit marriage to one man and one woman. These espoused theologies of marriage aspire to welcome same-sex couples for both public blessing in church after civil ceremonies and church ceremonies of marriage, offering the same welcome, pastoral care and liturgies as for mixed-sex couples. For these clergy, their espoused theologies could not be implemented in practice due firstly, to the prohibitions by the Church of England to bless same-sex couples and secondly, by the quadruple lock in the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013 to exempt the Church of England from marrying same-sex couples. Pastoral practice was experienced as a place of conflict between these participants' consciences and beliefs, the exemptions for the Church of England in the Marriage Act, and the Church's normative theology of marriage limited to mixed-sex couples and prohibition of blessing for same-sex couples.

Jen was not hopeful that the Church of England would seriously consider issues of equality in marriage in terms of gender and sexuality.[167] She experienced a 'huge gap' between her espoused theology of inclusive marriage (regardless of gender and sexuality) based on her operant pastoral practice, and the Church's normative theology of marriage based on binary gender-essentialist and heteronormative thinking.

[167] Interviewed in early February 2015. Working groups were set up in 2017 (Church of England, 2017).

> I don't think there is, [] as marriage is constituted by the Church of England at the moment, I don't think equality is even a consideration undertaken by the Church of England, unfortunately. [] I'm fully signed up to equality. I'd love to see it in action. As yet, I've never witnessed it. [laughing] It's something I pray for. And I think there are all kinds of reasons, and they're quite compelling reasons why equality is something to strive for but we may never achieve. Even those of us who really have willing hearts for this, and who would be willing to stand up and challenge politicians and church hierarchy about it. [] I think that that's – it's, it's, ah, for me it's a wonderful concept, something well worth aiming for. But I'm doubtful as to whether we'll get there. Because in law, there doesn't seem to be much equality in the law side of marriage.

When the House of Bishops issued their statement in February 2014, Jen had reacted.

> I'm just trying to think where, where I was when I encountered the statement first. [long pause] I think it was, I think it was on my laptop, I think it was in the news. I think it was in the news and then very quickly had a discussion with somebody else about it. [] And I was angry. Just angry. And [] I actually wrote to [the archbishop] saying that the House of Bishops does not speak for me.

The Bishops' Statement had prohibited blessing of same-sex couples or a ceremony in church. Jen explained her espoused theologies of blessing and of marriage:

> I think, I think offering a blessing – I think [laughing] I think in the Church, in our role as ministers, we should, more or less be able to be prepared to bless most things. Obviously, there are things that we can't bless, but I think, our job is to be open to that and to provide, a sign of God's blessing on things. I don't think that, just offering a blessing just doesn't feel [] sufficient. It doesn't feel that we are in any way [] acknowledging the depths of people's feelings; of people's commitments. I mean, for me, the tension is I'm more than willing to do it and I've done it. And [] I'm not, if the Bishop asked me if I'd done it, I'd tell him. [laughing] So [] but no, I, I, I just think it's – whatever we can do, is not sufficient.

She felt keenly the predicament of clergy in parish practice and a gulf between practice and the Church of England's legal decision-making forum, the General Synod:

> It's not – we have no sense of equality here [] except I don't, I don't believe that's necessarily clergy at the coal face. I think it's in the easier decision, at Synod and higher up the food chain. It's easy for them to say it, but they're not the people who actually have to deal with the actuality of it. And when you have people in front of you, for whom it's important to do it, you have no choice, you can't turn them away.

> [] You see I think there's a huge gap. I mean, there are clergy for whom it will be absolutely anathema. I feel really sorry for them because they're missing out on the beauty of, of, of this. But I, I just think we should, we should offer marriage and that's that. And I'm, I'm really hard pressed to see how the Church, the established Church, is actually able to get away with [] with discrimination. [] It matters, yes. [laughing] I think it matters a great deal. I think any, – unless we strive consciously for the ideal of equality, God-given equality, then, it's a huge thing. []

Jen emphasised the importance of the debate on theologies of marriage in the Church of England, for the pastoral care both of couples approaching clergy for blessing or marriage and of clergy who in conscience believe that marriage should be inclusive and equal, regardless of gender and sexuality.

> [] I actually feel that this is something that I struggle with, staying in the Church of England. It's – for me, it's a really big thing. I think the next massive row at Synod, and I'm, I would love to be prepared to be wrong about this – next huge thing at Synod is going to be over issues of sexuality. And I think, actually, that now, the time is come when if we can't be an inclusive Church, I, I think there may well be a split. And I hope there's a split, because I don't want to be part of a Church that can't include people. Equally. Whatever. It's a huge – it's a massive, massive gap. I think what's even worse is, I [] a lot of people that have come asking for things are very understanding and say, 'Well, I understand if you can't do a blessing.' [] They're very gracious. Very gracious. And they're very understanding. And they shouldn't have to be.

Jen concluded by voicing her deep, personal and pastoral dilemma:

> But what's bothering me is
> it's not just damaging to them.
> We are damaged by not doing it.
> That's, that's the biggie.
>
> We're not reflecting God
> in any way
> shape
> or form.

> By refusing this
> we are
> we're
>
> and I'm denying
>
> the Christ in me by having to refuse it
> which is harmful to me.
> And that's why I don't know
> how much longer it's possible to remain in this Church.

When the Government consulted about widening marriage in England to include same-sex couples, **Sarah i**nitially had doubts. She had accepted civil partnerships and had friends in committed same-sex relationships who did not want to marry, telling her, 'We don't want anything to do with the institution of marriage because it's part of the problem, not part of the solution.' Sarah told her story.

> Well I should be quite honest here. When I – when the gay marriage bill first came forward, I found myself quite resistant to it. And I was very surprised about that, because, as I say, I've always – I always passionately wanted to bless civil partnerships. I got as close to it as I possibly could, within the law. I was heartbroken that when our organist had a civil partnership the rules said we couldn't have a celebration in church with music. What is that about? You know I mean that, and I witnessed all the pain of that and shared it. But when marriage came in, I kind of thought we were doing things the wrong way round… And the speed with which it was going through, and I thought, in a way, 'Don't we need to sit down and think about what marriage is, and what we now think of it as? And do some work not just in the Church but actually in society?' So there were all these things going round in my mind.

After the law was enacted, a pastoral encounter with a colleague changed her mind, because of its effect in practice on someone in terms of their sense of identity, their feeling of recognition in public and their full acceptance in society through the legal normalisation of same-sex unions. Sarah's response resonated with Adrian Thatcher's 'person-centred theology' so that when a personal friend or family member is involved, theology becomes about the real person, not a concept, ideal or theory.

> And then, as it came forward – I have a great friend who had been actually – he's a gay man – but he had been, again, very doubtful about it. And he sings with the [choir], and on the day that it became law they did a lot of – they did a big event at [a venue] and then later there was a film with [an actor] that they did. And he came back and he said to me yesterday, 'I've realised,' he said, 'how important this is even to me,' he said, 'because of what it symbolises, and I never thought,' he said, 'that I could be so moved, and so, and to realise that it really did make a difference even to me, who's not in a partnership, it felt like a huge game-changer for me as a gay man and for the gay community.' And well at that point, I thought, 'Well I think I've got this wrong, in the sense that we need to do it and now we've got to work it out.'

Sarah reflected on the Church of England's response to the Government consultation and to the enactment of the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013 which included provision to exempt the Church of England:

> And am really – and of course I'm sorry that we're in this ridiculous situation in the Church of England with the quadruple lock. I mean, it's because I don't think it's sustainable. I really, really don't think this is sustainable, whatever happens in these dreadful conversations over the next few years,[168] it isn't sustainable. Thank goodness, I think, there really is a different attitude in the younger generation, in my perception. And if, we can't go on in this way, it makes, as somebody said, it makes the church look not just out of date but wrong, actually morally wrong. But actually, now I'm glad that we got the law in place because of what it has done, which means we now have to do that work and we can't just sit there and put it off and put it off and put if off – it's happened. So it was a challenge and I'm, I'm honest about that, it wasn't, 'Yes, this is wonderful!' As I say, I still think we've got a lot of work to do.

Sarah's change of mind on the Marriage Act led her to support reflection on the implications for marriage as both social change and also an urgent need for the Church to engage in theological reflection within its national context, as the established Church. Her sense of the Church looking 'not just out of date but wrong, actually morally wrong' to the society it served would become a profound indictment of the report which recommended

[168] A two-year facilitated listening process for 'Shared Conversations' was put in place in the dioceses of the Church of England for confidential listening, with small groups representing clergy and lay people with traditionalist views and those with views that accepted same-sex relationships within the Church. (Church of England, 2017).

no change to the Church's law or normative theology of marriage and no further debate (Church of England, 2017a). However, during interview in early 2015, Sarah hoped for a real engagement in England by the Church, at a time of social change:

> And I think a lot of my gay friends would accept that too, ['a lot of work to do'] because they don't want to be seen to be in a marriage – in marriage as it was, they're part of the culture of changing marriage, I think.

Sarah had lived and worked in contexts with many friends in same-sex relationships, including in the parish church where she was a priest. Ten years before, when civil partnerships became legal, Sarah observed from pastoral practice:

> So I went to a lot of civil partnerships. Couldn't of course do anything in the church for them, but some of those ceremonies were just so powerful. These people had been together for 50 years in some cases, where the relationship had been illegal. Such commitment and such strength. And again, sometimes you could just tell – very different personalities in a relationship that had worked. And that hadn't been open in the way that marriage relationships and heterosexual relationships had been. But none the less, so strong. So they were very powerful models, I think.

She knew of operant pastoral practice within the Church that accepted same-sex couples, transgressing boundaries of Church of England normative theology and the House of Bishops' Statement. She felt strongly that being 'under cover' was not right, but still hoped to look forward to future change in the Church of England:

> And [] you know, I think, I think it will – that's partly why I think it's unsustainable [the Church's position]. I mean, we know that people have, have blessed civil partnerships in church. Against the law. We know people have done it. [] Just as we know that there are people, there are clergy and everything, openly living in civil partnerships. And most bishops are hugely pastoral about it. And most congregations are hugely pastoral about it. But it has to be done under cover and under the – and it's not right. We feel strongly that it's not right and [] I will love the day when I can marry two people of the same gender.

Two participants in civil partnerships, Rob (clergy), and Steve (lay), expressed a desire to marry in church. Rob could not marry while holding a Bishop's licence to officiate as a priest. Steve had entered a civil partnership as soon as available and, although they had thought about converting the partnership to a marriage they not yet done so (Chapter 2). This would be a civil transaction not a church ceremony.

Rob was very clearly aware of the gap between their 'marriage' in practice and their civil partnership in law, to comply with the Church of England's prohibition of marriage for same-sex clergy. His espoused and operant theologies were in tension with the Church's normative theology of marriage for mixed-sex couples:

> We are aware of the Church's position on that [civil marriage for same-sex couples]. And the, resistance of the Church to accept marriage. We are very happy, with what we have. We have everything, we need. We're recognised in law, our wills, our, if we need somebody to make decisions on our behalves, in hospital or whatever, we've got all that. And we've got the right to adopt, and we've got the right to have a family. We – I mean; we don't *need* it, we don't want to do it to be pioneers and the first to do it. If we were to do it, we would want to have a real reason to do it. And I would love to be married, and we would love to marry. But we've already had one civil ceremony, and we don't want another civil marriage ceremony. When we can do it properly, and in church, then we'll do it. And we'll do it for the right reasons. And not to make a statement, um, to the Church because marriage is not about making statements. Marriage is about what brings us together and what we are to each other.

Rob considered the implications of the Church's 'resistance to accept' same-sex marriage in society and in pastoral practice:

> The Church does not own marriage. [] But they act as if they do. And that's something which we need to challenge, at every level. And, and certainly the whole quadruple lock – which is the centre of the Government's deal with the Church to, to keep things where they want them to be – is something which we do need to challenge very strongly, because [] it goes against the whole equality agenda, which the Government has. It goes against every understanding of, of equality for all people. And, and the whole of the European Human Rights Act, and the fact that the Church is so strongly campaigning for exemptions to the Human Rights Act is, is just awful.

As a senior priest in the Church of England engaged in parish practice and public life, Rob felt keenly the gap between the Church's 'strongly campaigning for exemptions' and his faith:

> That, I mean, my reading of the Gospel is what leads me to be an absolute campaigner for equality, because God loves all unconditionally and without exception. And does not make favourites of males over females or vice versa. All are

> God's children. And that is the phrase we understand. And so to me, equality is the absolute essential of God's love for all people. 'I, when I am lifted up will draw all people to myself.'[169] I won't go for the men first. I won't go for the women or the children first! *All* people have access to God's grace through Jesus Christ. And, and there is no difference.

Rob's espoused theology of salvation for all people through Jesus Christ translated into operant theology based on his practice as a parish priest and his role in consultation with the Government:

> So, when we offer the sacraments, and I would include marriage as a sacrament, I'm that old fashioned, then I want to make sure that we are doing so in a way that is equal and is an equal opportunity for all people. I would want people to take it very seriously because it is a serious thing. And, when we work with the Government, and I'm on a group which is working at the moment with the Government, we are looking seriously at whether or not the exemptions to the Equality Act[170] are something which need to be maintained, or whether that's something that we need to challenge at Parliamentary level. Which would then have implications for the Church. If it were decided that those Equality Act exemptions should no longer continue. And that would then pose a big headache for the Church. Because then its law would be illegal. In terms of the state law.

He explained the problem between Church and civil law, with reference to a requirement in marriage law in the past that prohibited the marriage of a man to his deceased wife's sister.[171] Rob referred to the controversy in the 19th century, reformed by Parliament in 1907 with exemption for Church of England clergy not to officiate at such marriages on grounds of conscience.[172]

> At the moment we've got these two parallel laws about what the Church can do and what the Church can't do. It's going back to the deceased wife's sister sort of thing. [] And we've got to rationalise it. With 21st century heads on. And understand what it is

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[169] John 12.32.

[170] HM Government (UK). (2010) *Equality Act 2010.* Retrieved from http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/pdfs/ukpga_20100015_en.pdf

[171] Marriages to a deceased wife's sister had occurred prior to 1835 but were voidable if challenged. In 1835 Parliament legislated to prevent further marriages, until reform in 1907 removed the prohibition. ((n. d.). Deceased wife's sister's marriage act 1907. Retrieved from Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deceased_Wife%27s_Sister%27s_Marriage_Act_1907)

[172] The UK Government had responded to the Church of England that clergy were permitted to refuse to marry divorced people on the grounds of conscience, which was therefore a precedent for the Church of England to accept same-sex marriage in Church with a conscience clause for clergy in the same way. (Government, 2012b, p. 17, para. 4.22).

> we are saying to the wider public who are part of the Christian Church, or part of the Church family, what we understand by relationships and the relationships that we want to affirm, and sanctify, through what we call sacrament of marriage.

Rob continued his espoused theology of inclusive equal marriage, regardless of gender and sexuality, in the Church, with reference to the three traditional 'causes' of marriage (1662):

> And I would want to say, that any two people who wish to come together to declare their love publicly, to seek God's blessing for it, should be allowed to do so. But we should still teach about what it means about that mutuality, that remedy for sin, and that place which provides a home where children can be brought up and raised. Same-sex couples are not exempted from any of those responsibilities and I think that the responsibilities of marriage are just as important as the privileges of marriage.

Rob articulated a continuity with the Church of England's traditional normative theology of marriage from the Book of Common Prayer (1662)[173] to the contemporary Church, holding fast to and reinterpreting the three causes, or virtues, and benefits of marriage: mutuality from 'mutual society,' remedy for sin (now termed fidelity) from 'remedy against sin' so that sexual relationship is chaste and undefiled when within lifelong marriage, and a home for children from 'the procreation of children.' From operant theology based on his committed union and family life, and espoused theology based on the equality of Christ's salvation for all, Rob reinterpreted the three causes, virtues and benefits of marriage with an espoused theology of marriage regardless of gender and sexuality of the spouses, with parenting and the nurture of children. Rob's recognition of the responsibilities of marriage resonates with Freeman's requirement for 'a normative vision of what functions are important to marriage as an institution' where values and experiences of same-sex couples are likely to be comparable to mixed-sex spouses (Freeman, 1999, p. 12).

In parish practice, however, Rob described the gap between his espoused theology of equal marriage and the Church's requirements:

[173] Three causes of marriage: 'First, it was ordained for the procreation of children, to be brought up in the fear and nurture of the Lord, and to the praise of his holy Name. Secondly, it was ordained for a remedy against sin, and to avoid fornication; that such persons as have not the gift of continency might marry, and keep themselves undefiled members of Christ's body. Thirdly, it was ordained for the mutual society, help, and comfort, that the one ought to have of the other, both in prosperity and adversity' (Church of England, 1662).

> Because we're known to be a welcoming, inclusive church, people do ask me, 'Can they get married in church?' I have to say, 'Sorry, you cannot. Because I am not allowed to. And even if I did go through the whole rigmarole, you wouldn't actually be married in law.' I would like to push the boundaries as far as I can, but that is one boundary I cannot push against because that is the law. And we have to be under the law in all we do. Especially when we act as registrars. I'd love to change that, and I'd dearly love to say to them, 'I would love to marry you.' 'But for the time being, you've actually got to go to get the civil part of that marriage done. If you then want to come to church and for me to pray with you, then that, that prayer might turn into a blessing, then that's something that I will be delighted and privileged to do.'

Rob reflected further on the implications of being unable to offer a ceremony of blessing or to officiate for same-sex unions, as a Church of England priest who is also a registrar, but only within the Church's exemptions from the Marriage Act, and so, not for same-sex couples:

> But what they want, and it's a – I mean people think that this discussion that we have about marriage in the Church is known by everybody – it isn't! People still think that they can get married in church because now they know that two people of the same-sex can get married. And they come to the church where they want to get married. And we turn them away. And what a witness is that? I mean – we're trying to, to get people to want to be married in church, because we believe that's the place where those commitments are made and where the vows are made in the presence of God. And, and blessed by the Church. This is – we're trying to advocate. And yet we're cutting off a substantial number of people who want to do that. Simply because they want to do it with a person of the same sex.

Rob identifies missional and pastoral implications for same-sex couples and their families who desire to celebrate together in Church, including regular worshippers who are practising Church of England laity, clergy and musicians. Not only is same-sex marriage (and civil partnership) restricted to civil ceremonies, but the Church of England refuses to provide a service of blessing, and prohibits clergy from blessing same-sex couples in civil unions.

> Ah, some, some have [come for prayers]. But, but some are just feeling rejected by the Church. Again. [For prayers] I will do whatever they would like to do. And most have been quite private small things. Of course, there is [a gap]. Course there is. And, and that's why I really do want to be an advocate for change in the, the way we do things in the Church. So that we are much more proactively welcoming people who

> are keen to have a same-sex marriage. There's no way round it really because that is the law. I mean – we could do something which looks like it. I mean, if we were to go down the continental model and they were to have a register office legal wedding, and then come to church for the religious wedding. I mean, that wouldn't be breaking the law, of the land, it would be breaking Church law because that liturgy has not been authorised. So, so that's a problem. But, which is the lesser of two evils really? In the sense of doing what's right?

Rob's question, 'which is the lesser of two evils… in the sense of doing what's right?' emphasises the serious significance of the Church's stance on marriage on pastoral and missional ministry serving the people of the nation for which it is the established Church, and on clergy as ministers prohibited from blessing and officiating at ceremonies for same-sex couples and their families. Freeman recognised the gap and argued that 'the institution of marriage offers structural and cultural support to heterosexual partners: the denial of marriage to gay couples deprives them of this support' (1999, p. 13). Since then, civil marriage has been opened to same-sex couples (2014), but the Church of England remains opposed and continues to prohibit prayer for blessing couples after same-sex civil unions, even in private.

Rick's espoused theology focused on discerning God's presence with couples, based on his parish practice including prayers with same-sex couples and his own lived experience of an equal marriage:

> My starting point there
> would be
> that
> God is in the love and faithfulness
>
> not in the gender
>
> as it were.
>
> So what I would like to see is the Church
>
> *long pause*
>
> reject first of all
> rejecting patriarchy
> because that's a key element in all of this

finally coming to terms with its own misogyny.

So

we

we need to get radical again about

the Gospel

the radical Jesus of the Gospels.

What the Church has an opportunity
really needs to do
is to say

'Jesus judged people
on the basis of their hatred

not of their love.'

Reflecting on Christian identity through baptism into a radical new gospel community that transcends binary social and cultural boundaries (Galatians 3.21), Rick again focused on love:

I think
when God sees us

I think
he doesn't see a man and a woman.
He sees a person
with a more or less thwarted
capacity to love.

And
if you like
salvation can be seen as

helping us no longer to be thwarted.

To truly grow into who we are.
And who we are
is not a

is not
defined by our
by

biology.

For Rick, human love offered glorious diversity in Christ, neither a limited monochrome greyness by removing labels nor a simplistic binary definition, but a sense of 'all that we are' in human variety being part of loving and being loved.

> I don't think God sees some androgynous wispiness.
>
> It's the other way around.
>
> All that we are is taken up into our capacity to love and be loved.

Two further participants who were not yet married or in a civil partnership for pastoral reasons both expressed a desire to marry in church. One was in a long-term same-sex relationship and was considering marriage. Another was in a long-term relationship where one of the couple had recently transitioned gender, so that from being prohibited from marriage or a blessing in church as a same-sex couple they were considering marriage in church as a mixed-sex couple after the gender recognition process was completed.

Conclusion

In Chapter 4, I bring these insights from participants' espoused theologies into conversation with premodern liturgies of blessing and friendship. I argue that when mutuality and fidelity are the two foundational benefits for both marriage and civil partnership, ceremonies with prayer for God's blessing in church by a priest can be recovered for the contemporary context and era. I argue that insights from premodern prayers and liturgies offer resources to reform the Church's contemporary liturgy of marriage to enable mixed-sex couples to express an equal, reciprocal union based on mutuality and fidelity, friendship, collegiality and romance. I argue that prayer for God's blessing of same-sex couples, whose relationships are also founded on mutuality and fidelity, have been expressed in the context of Holy Communion in the premodern era and can be recovered. For all couples, in the social reality of 21st century England, I argue that responsible choices for parenting and the nurture of children can be celebrated and affirmed in the Church, through baptism as incorporation into the Christian family and community, celebrated in Holy Communion.

Chapter 4

Normative voices of theology in liturgies of marriage and union in the Church in conversation with operant and espoused voices of theology in this research

Introduction

In this chapter I argue that rituals, actions and symbols from premodern era Christian blessings (Boswell, 1995) and traces of wider kinship bonds (Bray, 2003) resonate with meanings of equal marriage and partnership expressed by my contemporary research participants from within in the Church of England. Following from Chapter 3, where I interpreted operant and espoused theologies of equal marriage and partnership as converging within the Church of England in this research, I bring meanings from premodern liturgies and sworn friendship rituals expressing mutuality and fidelity into conversation with participants' contemporary theologies of marriage and partnership. I argue that the liturgies and ritual practices offer resources towards performing equal marriage (for mixed-sex couples) in Church; and for the blessing of couples in Church after civil unions (same-sex and mixed-sex, partnership and marriage).

The dialogue engages with the Christian basis for premodern blessings of two people based on harmony and peace in the social contexts of the first millennium of the Christian Church. Next, in the light of the contemporary pastoral context of the Church of England's prohibition of blessing for same-sex couples after civil unions, I reinterpret blessing in the light of premodern liturgies, informed by representative constructions from contemporary participants' theologies. I summarise resources to revise the Church of England's normative theology expressed in liturgies with reforms in three areas:

- to provide resources of prayers with God's blessing for couples in church after civil unions (both mixed-sex and same-sex);
- to enable performance of equal marriage (mixed-sex) by revision of the Church's contemporary marriage liturgy;
- and to signpost towards a theology of equal marriage open to all couples, with the virtues and benefits of mutuality and fidelity, where responsible choices for parenting and the nurture of children are affirmed in a pro/creative relationship.

On the basis of this research, with two strands of espoused theologies of equal marriage in church (mixed-sex, or for all couples regardless of gender and sexuality), I propose a discernment phase so that concurrent liturgies for equal mixed-sex marriage and for blessing after civil unions can inform through practice. This adopts a traditional Western Latin approach passed down from the fifth century and continued within the Anglican Communion[174] that recognises it is through liturgical prayer that belief comes into being.

Mutuality and fidelity in liturgies from the premodern era

Recognising the significance of prayer in forming as well as expressing belief, I propose that liturgies from premodern Eastern Orthodox traditions are relevant to contemporary liturgies of marriage and blessing for three reasons. The rituals have been handed down in sacramentaries from a range of Eastern churches and have been prayed and performed in practice. The liturgies include prayers for the uniting and blessing of two men that provide evidence of Christian blessing in church by clergy. Thirdly, I propose, they offer Christian interpretations from the premodern era of Biblical and early church narratives that resonate anew with contemporary Christian marriage and partnership.

Premodern ceremonies with prayers for betrothal, blessings of marriage and blessings of two men were researched in the 1980s, found 'in manuscript collections from all over the Christian world – from Italy to the island of Patmos to the monastery of St. Catherine on Mount Sinai' (Boswell, 1995, p. ix; p. 184).[175] Boswell argued that a ceremony for uniting two men had developed alongside nuptial blessings into a full office by the 12th century when both liturgies included rituals and symbols to express the union and call down God's blessing.[176] Boswell considered the status of these liturgies in detail, with a range of possible interpretations. Following Bray (2000, p. 17), I accepted the case 'for ways that social history and liturgical study can mutually illuminate each other' within my formal

[174] '*Lex orandi, lex credendi* (loosely translated as 'the law of praying [is] the law of believing').' Anglican Communion. (n. d.). *A building with foundations.* Retrieved from https://www.anglicancommunion.org/identity/doctrine/foundations.aspx

[175] List of manuscripts with ceremonies for two men. (Boswell, 1995, pp. 372-374).

[176] Boswell (1995, p. xxviii) noted that 'all of the surviving ceremonies invoke male archetypes' and argued that the marginalisation in history of groups including women may be the reason. He proposed that women may have devised 'their own forms and promises' as they may today, in a private, secure context. This was affirmed in my research with participant Kate. However, Boswell includes one Slavic liturgy that may have included two women (1995, p. 317). For the later, private relationship between Anne Lister and Ann Walker, see Bray (2003, p. 239-282, 319-321) and Choma (2019).

theological research methodology. I argue that, because manuscript evidence of the practice in the premodern era has survived in these *performed* liturgies, they can inform my research into marriage and partnership in the contemporary church, with the possibility of a fusion of horizons to express and create new meanings. In my interpretive reading, I adopt Boswell's recommendation that *'the ceremonies themselves speak most eloquently'* and 'readers may judge for themselves' (1995, pp. 191-198, emphasis added) from the texts Boswell appended[177] (1995, pp. 283-363). Agreeing with Stuart (1994), that Boswell 'is, I think, unwise to want to argue that they represent a commitment that is 'more' than friendship,' I have not used Boswell's language for premodern 'same-sex unions' in this research. I argue from the content of the liturgies themselves (in translation), that the rituals, symbols and words resonate with contemporary liturgies in my parish practice and with participants' narratives. As a practitioner-researcher participating in liturgies for 25 years, I argue in this research that the manuscripts published by Boswell, and research on traces of brotherhood in Western Latin churches (Bray, 2003), offer strong evidence for liturgical renewal through recovery of a theology of Christian unions of harmony and peace. Bray criticised Boswell's 'inadequate grasp' of the texts (1995) but affirmed 'Boswell rightly grasped that the theology of the *adelphopoeisis* turned on peace-making, a point… that potentially placed the rite in its context in intellectual history' (2003, pp. 316-317).

Prayers for uniting two men

Liturgies (Boswell, 1995, pp. 291-317) included bidding prayers for two men as 'not bound together by nature but in the unity of holy spirit' (p. 291), listing pairs of biblical characters and early church martyrs but not brothers (who were bound together by nature). Bible passages and references formed the basis for prayers by the priest for the uniting of the couple, who had 'come into thy holy church to be blessed and consecrated by Thee' (p. 299), 'wishing to receive thy sanctification and benediction' (p. 302) and been 'found worthy to stand before God's glory and be united in spirit' (p. 300). The priest prayed for God's blessing:

> O Lord Our God, who didst grant unto us all those things necessary for salvation and didst bid us to love one another and to forgive each other our failings, bless and consecrate, kind Lord and lover of good, these thy servants who love each other with a love of the spirit and have come into this thy holy church to be blessed and consecrated. Grant unto them unashamed fidelity [and] sincere love, and as Thou

[177] In the original languages and in English translation.

> didst vouchsafe unto thy holy disciples and apostles thy peace and love, bestow <them> also on these, O Christ our God, affording to them all those things needed for salvation and life eternal. For Thou art the light [and] the truth and thine is the glory (Boswell, 1995, p. 296, punctuation original).[178]

In the premodern liturgy, the ritual prayed for God's blessing on two people 'joining together in union of love and life,' in 'union in Christ' (p. 301) based on 'love in holy spirit.' The ritual actions by the two men (with prayers by the priest) included: placing right hands on the gospel book; prayers calling down God's blessing for uniting the couple in perfect love and inseparable life and in true love; prayers for forgiving each other, faithfulness, true love and peace, protection, all things necessary for salvation, sanctification, and coming into the eternal kingdom; the kiss of peace from priest to both, then to each other; receiving Holy Communion and the cup; and, sometimes, the priest leading the couple around the altar whilst reciting Psalm 133.

'In the image and likeness of God' – 'all one in Christ Jesus'

Liturgies celebrated the commitment of two men, uniting two faithful followers of Christ before God within the overarching context of God's 'fashion[ing] of humankind in image and likeness,'[179] and recalled God's presence with, and action through, faithful partnerships in the Hebrew scriptures and early church. The first creation narrative[180] was referenced both in prayers in the premodern liturgies and by contemporary participants in this research, who sensed equality before God in their marriage or partnership. I propose that both liturgical *practices* interpreted their sense of creation as about humankind being made in God's image where being male and female is diverse and celebrated within being human. Reflecting two different social and legal contexts, this leads to two different outcomes interpreted through practice. In the premodern liturgy prayers for the uniting and blessing of two men, both are understood as made in the image and likeness of God: and equal because as two men[181] they were of the *same* sex and gender. In the contemporary liturgy of marriage (Archbishops' Council 2000), prayers for the uniting and blessing of two people

[178] From Grotaferrata II (11th century Greek), with earlier versions from Sinai manuscripts (Boswell, 1995, pp. 294-296).
[179] (Boswell, 1995, p. 313, and pp. 291, 295, 311, 315, 319, 329, 336).
[180] 'And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness … So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them' (Genesis 1.26–27, KJV).
[181] For the significance of maintaining male honour through avoidance of submission and feminization, and the Christian subversion of martyrdom as ritual humiliation through marital imagery, see Middleton (2015, p. 202ff., 2018).

who are mixed sex are founded on a contemporary interpretation, that both are made in the image and likeness of God: but now are equal in the English social and legal context although they *differ* in sex and gender. The contemporary liturgy of marriage (2000), however, retains language of hierarchy and inequality from traditional gendered language and rubrics, addressed by reforms I propose later in this chapter.

Stephanie Coontz recognised as recent the contemporary aspiration of Western mixed-sex couples, 'to achieve the loyal, egalitarian relationships that Greek and Roman philosophers believed could exist only in a friendship between two men' (2005, p. 11). This ancient form of sworn friendship or brother-making had continued into premodern Christian liturgies (Boswell, 1995) and brotherhood rituals and monuments researched by Bray (2000, 2003). Coontz identified a new ideal for marriage based on love emerging in the 1950s, 'that true marital partnerships should be grounded in the equality of men and women' (2005, p. 8).[182] Far from ideal, Coontz concluded that this aspiration was 'a dangerous conclusion' because it led to divorce if love failed and a long-term decline in marriage (2005, p. 8). By contrast, my participants grounded their Christian 'ideal' theologies of equality in marriage and partnership in creation (Genesis 1.26-27) and through faith and baptism in Christ (Galatians 3.26-28). This emerging theology of equal marriage and partnership expressed by participants within the Church of England differs from Coontz's 'equality of men and women… a dangerous conclusion,' because it is based on equality with diversity among humankind in relationship with God: Creator, Christ and life-giving Spirit (Galatians 3.6-7).

Beattie (2015, p. 41) discussed human being in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1.26-27), to advocate 'a delicate balancing act between the affirmation of sexual difference as part of [creation's] original goodness' and recognition that difference can enable 'imagining a variety of ways in which gender expresses' human development and relationships. She asserted that while gender theory deconstructs modernist sexual

[182] The history of marriage as a partnership for kinship, inheritance and economic reasons was traced by Coontz (2005). In the last decade of the 18th century, 250 years before Coontz declared 'how love conquered marriage,' women's writing such as Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790) and *Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792), and Mary Robinson's *Letter to the Women of England on the Injustice of Mental Subordination* (1799, in Worsley, 2017, p. 322) paved the way for novels written by women, exploring new ideals – and dangers – of marriage based on love. Lucy Worsley concluded, 'For until you had seen such a relationship described by Jane Austen, you did not know that you wanted it. You had other expectations from marriage: security, wealth, children, respect and the comfortable feeling of having satisfied God's requirements of your time on earth. Only with Austen did women begin to think that they wanted – no, needed – to find Mr Darcy' (2017, pp. 324-5). However, the 'ordeal of marriage' in Austen's era and writing was what 'it [was] really about' (Blythe, R. (1996). Introduction. In J. Austen, *Emma*, pp. 7-32. London, UK: Penguin Books. p. 12. First published 1816).

binaries, future possibilities require theologians to reflect on the meaning of Paul's 'nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus' (Galatians 3.28, in Beattie, 2015, p. 47). Interpretation by participants in this research referenced theologies from the first biblical creation narrative where humankind are made in the image of God who blessed them, and Paul's theology in the letter to the Galatians referred to by Beattie, above. Participants, I have argued, were practitioners and 'competent speakers of a religion' whose lived responses and reflective theologies – of human equality based on creation in the image and likeness of God, restored in reunion in and through Christ – negotiated in reflective lived practice the changing social contexts and embodied experience of biblical, premodern and contemporary eras. Through a careful methodology that enabled participants' voices of theology 'to emerge from deep silence into language,' I argue that this research fosters emerging insights with a 'diaphanous' language 'between the universal and the particular, the infinity of our imagination and the finite vulnerability and dependence of our bodies' (Beattie, 2015, p. 47). In the light of participants' own Christian liturgical practices and embodied committed relationships that resonate with the 'unsayable mystery experienced by the soul' (2015, p. 47), I argue that the reconstructed narratives in Chapters 2 and 3 engaged in theological exploration of a fusion of horizons across time, culture and place.

In Chapter 3 I interpreted two strands of espoused meanings among participants: firstly that the two people to be united in marriage in church can be equal before God but mixed-sex (espousing the Church's normative theology); and secondly that the two people to be united in marriage in church can be two people, human beings both made in the image and likeness of God as the primary interpretation of equality (extending the Church's normative theology through emerging inclusive meanings of equal marriage and committed partnership). The second strand expressed gender difference as a celebrated part of the nuanced potential in diverse humankind, to embody and reflect the image and likeness of God in loving relationships and loving community. I argue that this fusion of horizons relating to Hebrew scripture, Christian liturgy and contemporary espoused theologies of marriage, offers a basis for a renewed theology of Christian union of two people based on recovery of the wider Christian context of Jesus's new community of equals (Galatians 3.28) through faith and baptism into Christ, founded on love and peace.[183]

[183] The fusion of horizons in this research does not imply that relationships between two people can be mapped between the premodern and contemporary eras. The potential for a fusion of horizons is, I argue, within the community of the Church formed in baptism into Christ, sharing the Eucharist.

Blessing unions of harmony and peace

The early Christian community recalled Jesus's gift of peace (John 14.27) in prayers for peace, harmony and love as foundational values of their new relationship, with God and one another, forming a new community united in love, holy spirit[184] and service (Boswell, 1995, p. 201). Boswell notes that 'apostolic love… and harmony…, unlikely as they may seem as conjugal themes, are constants of marital liturgies' in Eastern churches (1995, pp. 202–203), with rituals and symbols for blessings of two people, including saints and martyrs as well as couples marrying. Christians' primary motivation was service of God, following Jesus, his faithful apostles and martyrs, spreading the gospel of God's transforming love present in the risen Christ, through the Holy Spirit.

The church's normative theology of marriage was 'in part by default of a general ecclesiastical practice, that the couple married each other: the church at most witnessed and blessed (as it blessed everything from fields to swords)' (1995, p. 165). Boswell implied that generous blessing was normal for the church and for clergy, a theme expressed by participants including Jen, David, Rob and Steph. I argue that when a couple's relationship embodies mutuality and fidelity, Christian harmony, peace and love, the Church of England's prohibition of blessing is challenged. I argue that premodern liturgical practice of blessing two men in church and contemporary research participants' operant and espoused theologies fuse horizons through faithful practice, to challenge the Church of England's refusal to permit prayer with God's blessing for same-sex couples and refusal to provide a ceremony in church to celebrate their Christian, loving union.

In the premodern Western Latin Church, marriage remained a contract of the state where 'the very uncertainty and lack of evidence… is eloquent testimony to the low priority the early church assigned to the precise form of Christian celebration of matrimony' (Boswell, 1995, p. 165). A nuptial office bidding prayer (Latin, 7/8th century, 1995, p. 289) beseeched God 'to preserve in lengthy peace those joined together by legal congress,' setting marriage within the wider Christian context of unions between two people united in harmony and peace, with chaste, holy marriage for procreation: 'Thou who has linked the bonds of matrimony in the sweet yoke of concord and the chain of unbreakable peace so that in the multiplication of children of adoption the fecund chastity of the holy married may persist.' Reproduction was for 'the enhancement of the church' through the birth of infants who through baptism (1995, p. 163) were 'children of adoption' into God's family the Church,

[184] Or 'Holy Spirit.' Boswell's use of capital letters varies in the translations, reflecting the originals.

part of God's action for creation 'accomplished for the peopling of the world' (1995, p. 289). Early nuptial blessings envisaged marriage as a union of peace, harmony and chastity where sexual union was intended for procreation to enhance the Church in service of the gospel.

Writing at the end of the 20th century in a Western cultural context where marriage had become based on romantic love (Coontz, 2005), Boswell's comment – that apostolic love and harmony may seem unlikely as conjugal themes – can spur renewal of Christian marriage in conversation with premodern liturgies. This dialogue can, I propose, renew marriage as a union of Christian harmony and peace embodying mutuality and fidelity in the contemporary era. Coontz recognised the rapid dismantling of love-based, male breadwinner marriage by the turn of the third millennium that, after 150 years of development of this ideal in the West, the decline of love-based marriage had only taken 25 years (2005, p. 247). This rapid shift, from the late 20th century, underlies the changes in social reality, legal context, practice in relationships, and espoused theologies of parenting (including remaining child-free) that I have argued supersede the Church's third benefit of marriage – a 'biological complementarity' of the couple (Church of England, 2012), and widen the meaning of marriage with regard to the procreation of children (1662, Canon B30, in 2014).

The sense of mutuality and fidelity between two men coming for the blessing of their union expressed Christian love and harmony without reference to procreation, because of being the same sex. Alan Bray argued that rituals of sworn brotherhood found in the Western Latin premodern era were part of traditions of kinship and friendship, formed not only by blood relationships but by choice. A Latin form (Roman Catholic) of the Greek rite of brother-making survived in a 14th century manuscript from Trogir (Croatia), published and discussed by Bray (2003, pp. 126-136). He argued that, whilst marriage created kinship to extend a family, sworn brotherhood created kinship through ritual and promise in a network of relationships formed within the Christian social context, including rituals of baptism and betrothal (2003, p. 214). Through the inscriptions and locations of memorial monuments in churches, often near the altar where the Eucharist was celebrated, Bray traced the significance 'at the heart of religion's role' of avowed[185] friendship and kinship, 'on earth as much as in heaven' (2003, p. 209).

[185] Note that a contract in word and action (with vows or sworn promises that were not part of the liturgy) were often made for betrothal, marriage and brotherhood prior to attending the church for a blessing and Holy Communion (Bray, 2003, pp.23, 128, 244). This practice continues in the

This resonates with premodern narratives of Christian martyrs, both male and female, who would through a courageous death become victors united in heaven with Christ, but also with one another (Middleton, 2018),[186] including a tradition of 'paired saints' (Boswell, 1995, pp. 139-160). 'The Passion of Saints Sergius and Bacchus'[187] used language and imagery of marriage for the martyrs' union with Christ. This union of martyred human with eternal divine could overcome the shame of persecution and torture – which was clearly failure in earthly terms – to empower the martyr, encourage the church community under persecution, and glorify reunion with and through Christ, beyond death (Middleton, 2018).

Imagery from the premodern era continued to resonate in 20th century iconography and practice, for example, a crown as a reward for victory through military, athletic and steadfast endurance, as well as in coronation of an anointed monarch.[188] A crown of honour, purity, glory, unity[189] and blessing, was included in betrothal rituals and later for marriage in church (Boswell, 1995, pp. 207-208). A trace remains (in words only) within the contemporary marriage liturgy in the Church of England.[190] These layers of meaning offer, I argue, a deeper context for reflection on symbols and rituals in the contemporary Common Worship marriage liturgy. The wearing of a circlet of flowers by the bride in contemporary Western weddings and the continuation of crowning of both bride and groom as a central symbolic ritual in contemporary Orthodox marriage liturgies around the world, offer a dialogue across time and wider church practice.[191]

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contemporary era, including participants Rob, and Mark (and their respective partners) receiving Holy Communion after civil partnership ceremonies (above, page 96). See also Henwood (2015, pp. 1-2).

[186] See also Saint Perpetua (early 3rd century) as a 'warrior martyr and Christ's Bride in both female and male forms' (Middleton, 2015, p. 204).

[187] Roman soldiers from the third to fourth century AD who were martyred as Christians. Boswell's complete translation of the *Passion* was the first published in English (1995, p. 147, footnote 172).

[188] Imagery of crowning Jesus Christ 'with many crowns' as 'Virgin's son,' 'Lord of love,' 'Lord of peace,' and 'Lord of years,' links themes of crucifixion (crown of thorns, martyrdom) with resurrection and ascension (crown of coronation, glory, paradise) in lyrics to a hymn (Bridges, M. (1851)) still sung in Church of England liturgy. (Moore, S., Sayers, S., Forster, M., & Mayhew, K. (Eds.). (1996). Hymn 103. Crown him with many crowns. *Hymns Old & New*. (New Anglican Edn.). Bury St Edmunds, UK: Kevin Mayhew Ltd.)

[189] An angel of the Lord encourages Sergius and Bacchus with the promise that, 'as noble soldiers and athletes of Christ' would in God's presence be greeted by angels singing the hymn of victory and conferring on them 'the crowns of perfect faith and unity.' *The Passion of SS Sergius and Bacchus* (9th century), (in Boswell, p. 381, Middleton, 2018, p. 9).

[190] First blessing of the marriage (Archbishops' Council, 2000, p. 111).

[191] Orthodox marriage remains for mixed-sex couples only. Reynolds (1994) argued against Boswell's inclusion of crowning as a ritual within the blessing of two men because of the 'immense and specifically nuptial significance' of crowning in the Eastern church rites. I argue that when crowning is seen in its wider perspective of military and athletic (for example, Olympic) endeavour, there is a possibility of wider meanings from Christian martyrdom and marriage imageries. Reynolds was not

My argument that, in practice, procreation is an optional choice in the 21st century, generates the possibility that some mixed-sex couples coming for marriage may resonate more with premodern rituals and resources to celebrate peace, self-giving love and harmony on an equal, non-binary basis (from blessings of two men) than with premodern rituals for marriage that emphasise fertility and procreation. This leads to my proposal to reform the Church of England's contemporary marriage service with an alternative option lightly-revised for gender-neutral language and rubrics. In the next section, rituals, symbols and prayers in premodern liturgies provide evidence that couples performed Christian ceremonies uniting in marriage and uniting two men in brotherhood, before God, in church.

Rituals and symbols in premodern liturgies of blessing

The liturgies researched by Boswell (1995) include rituals and symbols that resonate with my contemporary parish practice of weddings, in a postliberal theological framework where cultural-linguistic dialogue between the eras aids interpretation through a fusion of horizons. This fusion through *performance of Christian unions of harmony and peace*, I argue, offers potential for reinterpreting the Church of England's contemporary marriage liturgy and for reintroducing blessings of same-sex couples in church, with extension for all couples after civil unions (mixed- and same-sex). The following sections consider how premodern rituals may inform and reform contemporary liturgy in the Church of England.

Rituals in common

Premodern liturgies from Greek and Slavonic churches celebrated marriage and the blessing of two men, openly in church with a priest officiating (Boswell, 1995, pp. 199–211). Within the wider kinship and friendship network, ritual brother-making was familiar to crusaders from the Latin West as a form of sworn brotherhood (Bray, 2003, pp. 126, 130). Both ceremonies (appended in Boswell, 1995, pp. 291-317) involved the joining of right hands, continuing the Roman ritual practice of agreeing a contract. The priest presided over the binding of hands, prayers and blessings, followed by a feast for families and guests afterwards. Marriage included the sharing of a common cup, also inherited from Roman practice, whilst uniting two men was followed by the administration of Holy Communion to the couple. The crowning of the couple in marriage was a pre-Christian practice that continued, reinterpreted as crowning in love, in purity and, following the Christian martyrs,

convinced 'that there was ever anything akin to the Eastern ceremony in the Latin West', but see Bray (2003, p. 130) for a Latin Catholic rite, with a prayer: 'Ble † ss these your servants [name] and [name] who in your name unite themselves as brothers, so that now and henceforth they may be worthy to be crowned by you here and in the age to come' (Bray, 2003, p. 131).

in victory. The joining of right hands and crowning of the couple formed the heart of marriage liturgies.

In the narrative of Roman Christian martyrs Sergius and Bacchus, marital, military and athletic imagery offered layers of meaning of a crown that symbolised perfect faith and unity (Boswell, 1995, p. 381) and justice (p. 385) or righteousness (Middleton, 2018). The two soldiers enduring martyrdom were to be united with Christ through death, and also united with one another (Middleton, 2018), in the eternal, spiritual union of Christian victory through courageous self-giving love.

In the liturgical rite for uniting two men, holding candles and placing right hands on the gospel book, the kiss of peace from the priest to the couple then to each other, and circling the altar led by the priest, were rituals that could be included in marriage. Boswell's assertion that by the 12th century the full offices of blessing two men and nuptial blessing could include all of these rituals (1995, p. 185) is a contested interpretation.[192] I argue that the extant manuscripts in themselves provide evidence that separate liturgies with different meanings sacralised both marriage and brother-making in the Eastern Orthodox churches, informing this research. Evidence from the premodern social context in Western Roman Catholic Christendom provided traces of sworn brotherhood as a form of kinship,[193] with one surviving Latin liturgy (Bray, 2003, pp. 130-133) to complement the manuscripts from the Eastern Orthodox Church tradition. Both premodern contexts were within traditional, patriarchal cultures where brotherhood pair bonds were formed without reference to procreation, in a social network of wider kinship and friendship bonds (Bray, 2003, *Chapter 1. Wedded Brother,* pp. 13-41).

[192] Two texts within one of the manuscripts may have been conflated, leading to a contested interpretation (Reynolds, 1994).

[193] Bray notes that premodern evidence is primarily for male sworn brotherhood, continuing with traces into modernity (2003, p. 205), where his research finds evidence of female friendships through monuments (2003, pp. 219-230) and diaries (pp. 239-264). See also (Choma, 2019).

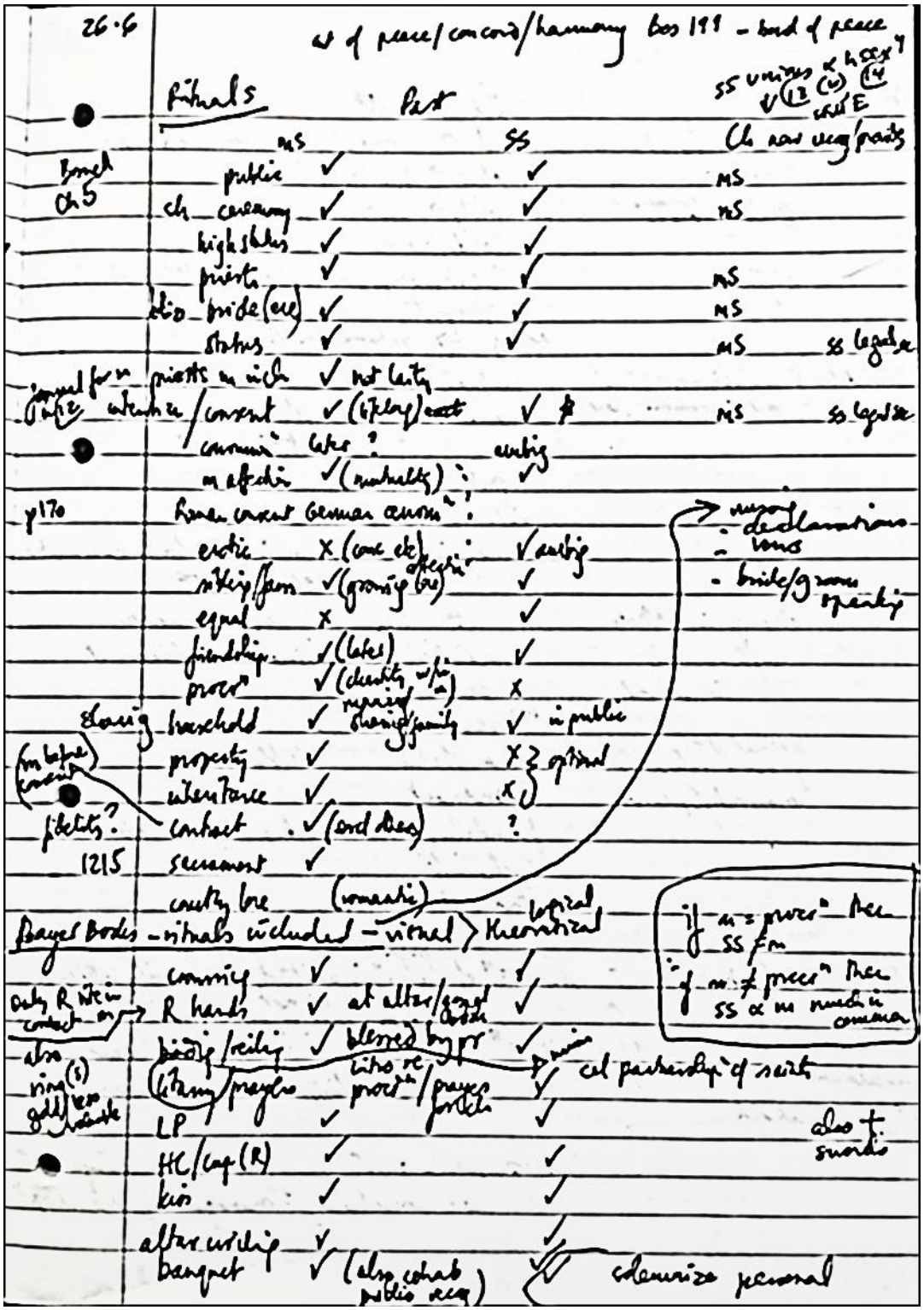

Figure 9. Table of rituals and symbols included in premodern liturgies comparing nuptial blessings and blessings of two men (based on Boswell, 1995).[194]

[194] The short list in the top right column shows ritual permitted in the Church of England (only for mixed-sex couples). There is therefore a wealth of ritual and symbol to recover from premodern liturgical resources in the longer list on the left.
In contemporary Orthodox Church liturgies of marriage, crowning remains a major ritual. Retrieved from http://web.mit.edu/manoli/www/wedding/ceremony.html

An emphasis on peace and harmony, love and lifelong commitment, with prayers for protection and eternal salvation characterises both ceremonies. The bride and groom do not speak (nor do the two men),[195] because the formal contract and binding oaths of betrothal and marriage, and of sworn brotherhood, were transacted before these liturgies in the church. This was the same in the Western Latin Church (Bray, 2003, p. 29) prior to 1215 when marriage was formally required in the church. There is a difference in emphasis for marriage with prayers for fertility and procreation with biblical readings referring to family life. The readings in liturgies of blessing of two men focused on peace and love, in particular from Psalm 133, John's gospel and 1 Corinthians 13 (1995, p. 216). When procreation and parenting are recognised as optional in the contemporary era with the third benefit of marriage reframed in a wider, pro/creative relationship, I argue that resources from premodern liturgies and rituals uniting two people in Christian harmony and peace can inform revision and enrichment of contemporary rites.

Reinterpreting marriage in the light of premodern liturgies of blessing

This section signposts possibilities for reinterpreting the Church's Common Worship (Archbishops' Council, 2000) marriage liturgy in the light of premodern liturgies of blessing of union characterised by mutuality and fidelity, with the Church's third benefit reinterpreted as responsible choices for parenting and the nurture of children, in a pro/creative relationship. I argue that these premodern blessings of two men, two people coming before God of equal status entering into a lifelong relationship, offer resources to reinterpret and renew the 21st century Common Worship marriage liturgy.

Love as the ground of mutuality and fidelity

Themes of mutuality and fidelity refocus marriage (or partnership) on a foundation of love, encompassing meanings of apostolic love *(agape)* from the early Christian era, as well as love that is based on a partnership of two friends *(philia)*, committed in personal love that may be (but not always) romantic and erotic *(eros)*. In a transition period of discernment through practice in the contemporary Church of England, liturgies in parallel for equal marriage (mixed-sex) and for blessing of civil unions in Church would respect the two strands of espoused theologies of equal marriage in this research (only for mixed-sex

[195] See Figure 9.

couples with same-sex partnerships and civil unions blessed, or for all couples). Liturgies for both strands can be based on these themes from premodern liturgies.

I propose that the presence of plural co-existing meanings – expressed in nuanced language of loving – resonates with the convergence of meanings among my research participants within the Church of England who are married and in civil partnerships. Rather than defining love and loving by essentialist sex and gender dichotomies and terminology, an inclusive theology of equal marriage and partnership emerging from this research expresses multiple, concurrent, different ways of loving, from the beginning of a relationship and throughout a long period of living together in union. In a social context where couples now choose whether to marry or cohabit, and to have children or not, Christian marriage in church can become a celebration of a union between two people of equal status in law, social norms and practice, based on the love they have discovered together 'within the love of God' (1 John 4.16).

Rob's espoused theology moved into poetic language I have interpreted as almost liturgical, echoing the Church's marriage Preface (2000, p. 105).

These two people have come together
to make their vows to each other.

So it is about two souls

and is a soul sexed?

I'm not sure that it is

But these two halves have found each other.
These two loving beings
have found reciprocity and mutuality
in the other.

And that's what makes their relationship
the amazing thing that it is
and which has drawn you here
to celebrate it.

And it's not made up of the fact
that one has got these chromosomes
and the other has got those chromosomes
and that biology
or this.

I mean
it's about those two persons
those two whole persons.
Bodied persons
yes
but souls and minds
and inspiring thoughts.

The creative

the

Yeah.

I propose a transitional period in the Church of England, with an alternative marriage liturgy using gender-neutral language and a new liturgy with prayer for the blessing of same-sex unions in church.[196] Both trial liturgies can inform the Church's normative theologies of marriage and of blessing, through liturgy performed in practice. A transitional period can enable discernment of an emerging inclusive theology of Christian equal marriage. A theology of vowed partnership with blessing in church may emerge in parallel with both of the possible theologies of marriage, for mixed-sex couples in church or for all couples regardless of sex and gender. A liturgy for prayers with blessing for couples after civil unions could be offered in parallel. A further option to trial during a transitional period of discernment would be the Holy Eucharist as the context for prayer and blessing of Christian same-sex unions after civil contracts, recovering premodern practices of blessing in church of kinship and friendship bonds.

Harmony, peace and passion

Reformed liturgies of Christian marriage and for the blessing of vowed partnership or friendship (optionally expressed in contemporary English law as civil unions) can celebrate themes recovered from premodern rituals: love, harmony and peace, mutuality based on equality, fidelity in a lifelong commitment, partnership based on 'oneness of mind' and self-giving care for one another. Marriage can celebrate not only the personal love found between the couple – which is the expectation for contemporary couples coming for a church wedding – but its foundation in the love of God revealed in Christ, indwelling human unions of Christian marriage, and of Christian brotherhood and friendship, made explicit in the early church litanies and biblical readings chosen for blessings of two men. For example,

[196] And after mixed-sex civil partnerships, made legal from 26th May 2019, to be transacted by 31st December 2019 or before. (n. d.) Retrieved from http://equalcivilpartnerships.org.uk/

the Pauline celebration of love in 1 Corinthians 13 (included in liturgies for the uniting of two men) has become one of the most popular readings at contemporary church weddings, celebrating love that never ends, love that is patient and kind, continuing the themes of harmony and concord. Contemporary couples interpret this chapter through the lens of their personal romantic love based on their own experience of loving, equal partnership.

A popular Bible reading for contemporary church weddings is from the Song of Songs (2.10-13; 8.6,7) about romantic, reciprocal love that inspired nuptial language in Christian mysticism (Beattie, 2015, p. 45), resonating with the apostle Paul's analogy (Ephesians 5. 21-33) of marriage reflecting the union of Christ with the Church (Middleton, 2015, pp. 206-207). The Song has layers of meaning, with a parallel ideal of equality suggested through sibling language that would have been familiar in patristic and premodern contexts (Boswell, 1995, pp. 128–131). Fulford reflected on the Genesis creation narratives and the Song of Songs, with a possibility 'for not seeing reproduction as a normative expectation of every human couple in their sexual intimacy, even if it is enjoined upon humanity as a species.' Wisdom literature qualified the passionate mutual delight between the lovers in the Song, in the context of humankind's deepest desire for union with the divine (Fulford, 2016, p. 57). This offers potential for re-contextualising contemporary committed relationships of Christian harmony and peace (kinship and friendship, including marriage and partnership), in the light of Paul's analogous union of Christ with the Church (Ephesians 5).

Mutuality, fidelity, parenting and the nurture of children

As I have argued, because parenting is no longer inevitable biologically and has in practice become possible other than through sexual intercourse, meanings of marriage as a creative union can be renewed to celebrate, and participate in, God's creating love, adoption into the Christian family through Christ's self-giving love, and the new basis of incorporation through baptism in water and Spirit, sharing Holy Communion. This Christian union of two people in a wider family beyond marriage and procreation was present in liturgies for uniting two men, sharing Holy Communion. Gradually, the pre-Christian ritual sharing of a common cup by premodern couples in marriage was absorbed into sharing Holy Communion, as marriage developed into a nuptial mass and sacrament (1215).

Bray (2000, 2003) argued that kinship rituals in the Western Latin Church context – performed at the church door (and beyond the church) – were affirmed *afterwards* at the altar through Holy Communion. Betrothal, baptism at the entry to the church and marriage

at the church door were kinship rituals within the social context of the Christian premodern era, with traces continuing into modernity (2003, pp. 23-24, 38-39, 101, 111). Bray included sworn friendship as a kinship ritual between two men, where 'the formula for a betrothal and that for "wedded" brotherhood were in large measure the same' (2003, p. 83). This voluntary avowal created a bond of brotherhood that was recognised socially and, in the West, traced in churches through monuments, some located intentionally near the altar. Bray asserted a conviction underlying his book, that 'the Eucharist of traditional Christianity was designed to restore defective human relations in the world about it, and that work was the work of kinship and of friendship' (2003, p. 90). He discussed in detail the significance of a same-sex couple, after their private exchange of rings, receiving Holy Communion on Easter Day[197] before an altar with a stained glass window above, interpreted by Bray as depicting a range of kinship bonds (2003, p. 246ff.)

In contemporary practice, Holy Communion (the Eucharist) has once again become – or has continued to be – an overarching ritual of divine hospitality in reunion with God in Christ through the presence and action of the Spirit, to include same-sex couples, families and guests in a religious context where their civil unions may not be blessed by Church of England clergy or in church liturgies.[198] Renewal of Christian unions of harmony and peace could recover and continue the context of Holy Communion as an inclusive liturgy after both marriage and committed partnership in Church.[199]

Reinterpreting blessings of same-sex unions in Church

Research participants in professional and pastoral practice as clergy, and all participants in their own relationships, sensed God's presence in rituals and celebrations of both marriage and civil partnership (Chapter 3). This poetics of testimony (Walton, 2012) resonated with prayers in the premodern liturgies for uniting two men where God's presence and blessing is bidden. Clergy in this research offered pastoral care for all couples who sought to celebrate their committed union in church, but are not permitted to pray with same-sex couples for God's blessing, or to hold a service for them to celebrate in church. Clergy in the

[197] 1834 (Choma, 2019, pp. 305-311). Bray (2003) argued that vowed friendship or sworn brotherhood in England continued after the Reformation, traced through literature with reference to receiving Holy Communion in church and/or by the positioning of memorial monuments adjacent to the altar, and graves juxtaposed.
[198] Rob and Luke's narratives in Chapter 2, and (Henwood, 2015, pp. 1-2).
[199] In my 20 years' practice of marriages in Church (mixed-sex), only three of about 200 weddings were within Holy Communion.

Church of England's General Synod expressed their pastoral concerns, when the House of Bishops (2017a) recommended no change in the Church and, therefore, continuation of the prohibition of blessing for same-sex couples after civil unions. In this research (through interviews in 2015–16), clergy participants reflected strong concern from their parish practice about the prohibition of blessing for same-sex couples.

A review of research literature reported that 'a gap exists in the literature that specifically examines how clergy… understand and approach the issue of same-sex marriage personally' (Kirby, et al., 2017, p. 913). I have argued (page 52) that participants in this research are faithful Christian practitioners (Cameron, et al.) who have 'interiorized' their religion (Lindbeck), so that my analysis of their narratives – in dialogue with biblical stories they relate within the tradition – can 'uncover the hidden normativity' (Ganzevoort) of theologies of equal marriage and partnership within the Church of England, through the poetics of practice and of testimony (Walton) expressed in narrative reconstructions (Bold). In the following section Jen, Rick, Sarah and David, clergy participants in this research, reflect on their practice and the pastoral damage experienced from the Church's prohibition of blessing for same-sex couples.[200]

Jen's theology of blessing exposed a gap with the Church's refusal to recognise loving, committed relationships between same-sex couples in church:

> I think offering a blessing
>
> I think
>
> *laughing*
>
> I think
> in the church
> in our role as ministers
> we should
> more or less
> be prepared to bless most things
> I think our job
> is to be open to that
> and to provide
>
> a sign of God's blessing on things.
>
> Just offering a blessing
> just doesn't feel
> sufficient

[200] See Chapters 2 and 3 for Fiona, Steph, Rob and Luke's pastoral concerns (also clergy).

it doesn't feel that we are in any way
acknowledging the depths of people's feelings
of people's commitments

I just think
we should

we should offer marriage and that's that.

Rick had met with a couple pastorally who were in a same-sex relationship, became civil partners and asked him to have a service with their families to pray with them:

That [blessing]
set me on a journey which

wasn't a difficult journey
and it didn't take me long to get to where I ended up

which was that
it really
what matters
is not
is
that people love each other
not
the gender of the person they love.

Jen had also been asked to pray with same-sex couples and had been a guest at civil, secular ceremonies. She reflected on whether there was a difference in practice from prayer with a wedding couple, when the couple were the same sex. She sensed the presence of God:

Absolutely.
Absolutely.
And it's really clear.
And
the blessings that I've done
the Holy Spirit always turns up.

But the

officially
the Holy Spirit *can't* turn up.
Yeah.

That's an interesting concept isn't it?
laughing

laughing

And
I mean
how anybody thinks
they can stop the Holy Spirit from turning up
and actually
you know
sometimes you go to civil wedding ceremonies
the Holy Spirit's there anyway.
So
you know
civil partnerships and
the Holy Spirit turns up.
And you think

'Right, okay.'

And that's without God even being mentioned.
In fact

that's with God being *deliberately excluded*.

Sarah sensed the presence of God with same-sex couples:

Oh completely

Absolutely

And it
and in the Town Hall ceremonies actually.

Some of them have been as power-

in a different way
as powerful
or more powerful
than some weddings I've done to be honest.

They really have
because
say
they were celebrating.

Even though the sacramental element was missing
and you miss it

and the prayer element is missing
and you desperately

miss it.

Her heartfelt expression of desperately missing the liturgy and context of the Church of England prayer and church family for same-sex ceremonies voiced the profound sense of absence when all religious content is removed, under civil law. Sarah's deeply-held operant and espoused theologies of God's presence with the couple – wherever they were – led to her hope to officiate in church one day.

> Some of those ceremonies,
> people were able to express to each other such
>
> long committed powerful strong relationships that
> that
> yeah
> I mean they were
> how was God not there?
>
> God's bigger than the Church
>
> *laughing*
>
> God
> was there as much.
> But
>
> why couldn't it be sacramental?
> That's obviously
> that's
>
> I'm very upset about that
>
> but
>
> and I would just love to do it.

David, whilst holding an espoused theology of civil partnership as different from marriage in church, hoped to be able to welcome same-sex couples in a service. He linked his hope – that the Church would acknowledge civil partners in church – to marriage, realising as he spoke who was officiating:

> I think
>
> I
>
> deeply
> deeply hoped
> still wish

though late in the day
that the Church had at the time
and can still
acknowledge civil partnership
where there is faithful
mutual
loving relationship.

And provide the liturgy that celebrates that.

Long for it.

I mean
I will pray with anybody
you know
and I mean my theology of marriage
is that I am an agent of society
celebrating the public declaration of two people.

I don't marry them –
they marry themselves.

This recognition in David's theology of marriage – that two people marry each other – opens the possibility to recognise that a same-sex couple can perform a ritual with symbols to 'marry themselves,' beyond a legal transaction (civil) to a profound embodied sacrament whether recognised by the Church or not.

Clergy participants understood that they were an agent (David), vessel (Luke), officiant (Sarah) and registrar (Rob), but did not marry the couple. The performance of the marriage by the couple is made clear in the liturgy of marriage in the Proclamation: 'In the presence of God, and before this congregation, *N* and *N* have given their consent and made their marriage vows to each other' (Archbishops' Council, 2000, p. 110). In premodern liturgies for uniting two men, the giving of rings is missing, because a ring was originally a betrothal ring for the woman, part of the 'handing over' from father to bridegroom in a ceremony of blessing both of the ring and of the husband and wife at the church door (Boswell, 1995, pp. 215, 306-307). The Proclamation (2000, p. 110) affirms that wedding rings are outward signs of the marriage: 'They have declared their marriage by the joining of hands and by the giving and receiving of rings.' Contemporary participants who entered civil partnerships had given and received rings, in parallel with marriage rituals, outward signs of their (same-sex) union. This custom, added to a civil partnership ceremony, interprets same-sex union

embodying mutuality and fidelity in parallel with marriage, [201] through a ritual declaring the public status of the couple. I argue that the giving of rings by *both to each other* converges in meaning, reinterpreting marriage as equal and reciprocal for mixed-sex couples[202] and potentially inclusive of same-sex couples, because diverse couples have adopted this ritual in practice to express their equal civil unions.

After the Proclamation (2000, p. 110), the joining of the couples' right hands follows when the minister says, 'Those whom God has joined together let no-one put asunder.' I argue that evidence from premodern liturgies of blessing two men in Christian harmony and peace, from participants' own relationships of equal marriage or civil partnership, and from participants' espoused theologies of blessing, focuses on this statement to challenge the Church of England's normative theology. I argue in this research that God's presence ('those whom God has joined together') has been sensed with same-sex couples in blessings of two men in church by a priest (premodern), in ceremonies for civil unions in secular venues, in the lived experience of participants in civil partnerships (including clergy), and by clergy and congregations ('faithful Christian people [who are] themselves bearers of theology' (Cameron, et al., p. 51)), who recognise God's presence with couples. This evidence challenges the Church of England's normative theology of marriage that excludes loving, committed same-sex couples from blessing, because of the serious implication (voiced in participants' narratives) that they are not among 'those whom God has joined together,' leading to a deep sense of rejection.

Pete expressed the difference between civil partnership and marriage, seeking marriage in church with Simon.

> But for me, a civil partnership would be a contract more in terms of legality. Whereas a marriage would be a contract that *includes* that but goes one stage – not further, I'd say further but further isn't enough – but is more than just a legal contract. It's a spiritual commitment. It's a contract in front of God. And human-made contracts are human, and so are fallible and full of the human condition. Whereas, if you make a contract in front of God, then for me that is a much more serious undertaking. You can still break it – if I start bargaining with God, I can still break those bargains. So, it's still very human to fail in those contracts. But you're still making a, for me, a very

[201] With the possibility of parenting and the nurture of children.
[202] The practice of only the groom giving the bride a ring was rare in my parish practice of church marriage, but remains an option.

> serious undertaking. And very joyful and glorious too. But still, it has a greater breadth, depth. It transcends dimensions, I guess.

As a lay couple in the Church, Pete and Simon could marry in a civil ceremony, but without 'the greater depth' of marriage in church 'in front of God' that 'transcends dimensions.' After a secular civil partnership or marriage, they would not be permitted to have a ceremony in a Church of England parish church to celebrate with prayers, hymns, symbols and a blessing in the community's sacred space. During the interview, this realisation led to a profound sense of astonishment, and dismay.

God's presence, transcending and overriding

And yet – *God's presence was sensed* – as research participants voiced, despite the Church's prohibition of services in church and of blessing (and the secular premises). This poetics of testimony about embodied lives may be currently 'unspeakable' (Walton, 2012, p. 180) in the debate on human sexuality and relationships within the Church of England. Moreover, during interviews spontaneous laughter exploded unexpectedly, demonstrating *participants' sense of incongruity at the very idea that God could be shut out* from secular venues. This incongruity (experienced by participants bodily in sudden laughter) can be interpreted as the bringing together of two opposite meanings, to create an unexpected meaning (Gilhus, in Isherwood and Stuart, 1998, p. 140). Grace in laughter (1998, p. 145), 'Christian laughter, a laughter that 'body's forth' from being incorporated into the body of Christ is… 'hope's last weapon'.' (1998, pp. 145-146, quoting Kuschel, and Cox, punctuation original). I interpret, and argue, that my participants' grace-filled Christian laughter revealed the unexpected meaning that God was present – despite the vacuum created by the Church's prohibition of blessing[203] and legal prohibition of religious content in civil ceremonies – *a divine overriding that 'transcend[ed] dimensions'*[204] even in a secular context. In co-constructive narratives through interview, two participants had used language of *God's overriding presence*: Pete, that being normal as parents in a Christian same-sex relationship 'is the overriding sense. Absolutely. Yes' (Chapter 2), and Fiona, that

[203] The vacuum created by the Church's prohibition of a service in church with prayers for blessing, so that the only ceremony a same-sex couple is permitted in law is at a civil venue.
[204] Pete, above.

'to 'love God and love your neighbour' is the overriding' biblical commandment cited by Jesus (Chapter 3).[205]

Participants' spontaneous laughter erupted – intervened – to expose the gap between loving practice and official prohibition with the effect of subverting and deconstructing the power of the Church. Grace-filled laughter, 'hope's last weapon' warned of serious consequences for Christian faith and pastoral care, because in practice the Church of England was experienced and perceived by participants as *actively excluding* loving same-sex couples from prayer for God's blessing in its churches, and as *intentionally prohibiting* its clergy from blessing, against their faith and consciences.[206] The gap is exposed by laughter: it is no longer a vacuum controlled by the Church through prohibition of blessing, but filled with the presence of God's Holy Spirit – overriding and transcending dimensions, within and among those present.[207]

Lifting the Church's prohibition of blessing

The most urgent pastoral challenge raised by participants in this research is the Church's prohibition of blessing of same-sex couples in legal civil unions in church by a priest. I have argued that the Church's exclusive theology of marriage – expressed by the third benefit submitted to the UK Government as 'biological complementarity'[208] – has been superseded through social and legal changes in practice, by new knowledge on gender, sexuality and relationships in academic research, and by emerging espoused theologies of participants within the Church that recognise God's love present with couples beyond binary gender and heteronormative boundaries. I have noted that the Church of England made exemptions for clergy who in conscience would not officiate for services for the marriage of couples where one or both were divorced (Chapter 1). This research offers espoused theologies of loving union to enter the debate and seek the removal of the Church's prohibition of blessing for same-sex couples.

[205] Luke 10.27.
[206] Clergy participants recognised that the precedent of a conscience clause to exempt clergy who, in this case, could not bless same-sex couples would be appropriate, but were experiencing their own consciences as being conflicted by the Church's prohibition of blessing.
[207] The 'overriding' presence of God sensed and narrated by research participants was particularly poignant, given that practising Christian (and all) same-sex couples and their families are not permitted to celebrate with a service or blessing in Church of England churches. Civil partnerships and civil marriage ceremonies for same-sex couples (and mixed-sex) must be in civil premises (without religious content or officiants, by law).
[208] See Chapter 1. (Church of England, 2012).

Towards equal marriage in the Church of England

In this chapter I have argued that premodern liturgies of blessing of two men provide evidence of church ceremonies conducted by a priest from the premodern era. By interpreting a theology of Christian equal marriage in this research where mutuality and fidelity are two embodied virtues in a pro/creative union – with parenting and the nurture of children as a third, responsible and optional expression – I argue that assumptions and taboos about sexual intimacy, preoccupation with the protection of fertility for legitimacy of heirs, and theories of gender complementarity, are superseded as arguments for the Church to prohibit prayer for God's blessing.

A union between two people expressing a bond of mutuality and fidelity celebrated in church in premodern times focused on God's presence with the couple, tracing God's presence with biblical pairings in history by the committed love they shared. This shifted the foundation away from a preoccupation with sexual intimacy and, in particular, sexual intercourse. It is not clear whether unions of two men celebrated and blessed in the church in the premodern era had an erotic or sexual component (Boswell, 1995, p. 189, Bray, 2003, p. 38). In practice within the contemporary Church of England, civil partnerships for economic and legal reasons are permitted because this ambiguity allowed an absence of erotic or sexual intimacy, to permit doctrinal compliance: that sexual intercourse is only within marriage.[209] Even when this mandatory requirement of celibacy is affirmed[210] by a priest, the union of a same-sex couple (including one or both as clergy) is not permitted either to be blessed in church or in private by God through prayer led by a priest-colleague, or to have a ceremony in church celebrating their lawful civil union. The swift advent of civil marriage for same-sex couples removed the ambiguity of a celibate relationship that had been welcomed by the Church in civil partnership because, according to the Church's normative theology, marriage *assumes and depends on* a sexual relationship, despite exceptions discussed in Chapter 3. The House of Bishops clamped down on informal blessings of civil partnerships as their reaction to the introduction of civil marriage for same-sex couples (2014). Some clergy who chose legally to marry their same-sex partner lost their licences as priests in the Church of England.[211]

[209] Civil partnerships only for same-sex couples have been challenged in the Supreme Court (2018) by a mixed-sex couple with children, illustrating the ambiguity of celibacy for same-sex couples required by the Church through civil partnership and prohibition of marriage. See above (p. 18).
[210] Affirmation of compliance with the House of Bishops (Church of England, 1991) that the cleric is celibate.
[211] Chapter 1.

Consent not consummation

Yet English law permits marriage to be 'platonic' so that under civil law, a sexual relationship with consummation is not assumed, and not required. In a judgment reported by *The Times* (2018), Sir James Munby ruled:

> "A sexual relationship is not necessary for there to be a valid marriage." He said the law was stated very clearly, if in Latin, for the use of which he apologised, in an 1868 case by Sir James Wilde who said: "The truth is, *consensus non concubitus facit matrimonium*." He said: "The law has always recognised that a couple may take each other as wife and husband *tanquam soror vel tanquam frater* [as sister and brother], as our ancestors would have put it."[212]

The Church of England has recognised the presence of mutuality and fidelity in same-sex relationships so that the third benefit, asserted as biological complementarity, has become the focus for theological debate not only within the Church of England but in other provinces, some of which have already moved towards permitting ceremonies for same-sex unions in church and are trialling liturgies (Chapter 1). The argument of my research is, that by refocusing a theology of marriage as founded on mutuality and fidelity with parenting and the nurture of children as a responsible optional possibility, and through reappraising premodern liturgies of unions including of two men, the Church's focus on sexual intercourse with an underlying biological complementarity as a determining factor of marriage is questioned and re-contextualised.

This can free the Church to celebrate and bless the mutual love and faithful commitment shared by same-sex and mixed-sex couples, in church, with a priest officiating. A service of blessing, possibly revised from the existing 'Service of Prayer and Dedication after Civil Marriage' or 'Thanksgiving for Marriage' (Archbishops' Council, 2000, pp. 173–193) could be piloted for use after civil unions, along lines similar to the proposal by the Diocesan Synod of the Diocese of Hereford (October 2017).[213] When civil partnerships are opened to mixed-sex couples (2020), this proposed service could celebrate and pray for God's blessing in church for all couples after civil unions, whether same-sex or mixed-sex. Through liturgy

[212] See also Chapter 2. ('Platonic' couple can be joint parents. (2018, March 14). *The Times*. Retrieved from https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/platonic-couple-can-be-joint-parents-0kk0dhd7n)
[213] See Chapter 1. (Davies, M. (2017, October 27). Bishop of Hereford: Same-sex blessings vote is 'right and consistent'. *Church Times.* Retrieved from https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2017/27-october/news/uk/hereford-same-sex-blessings-vote-is-right-and-consistent)

and practice, theological reflection can discern God's presence in a continuing dialogue among the Anglican strands of scripture, tradition and reason, informed by experience, seeking meanings of marriage and partnership as converging or parallel. My theological reflection on parish practice (during the field work for this research) of a mixed-sex marriage in church and a blessing of a civil-married couple, sought to discern God's presence through pastoral engagement with the couples and the liturgy.[214]

Equality expressed through language

The contemporary marriage liturgy can be rebalanced (for mixed-sex couples) within canon law towards mutuality and fidelity in an equal reciprocal union, by providing an alternative option with non-binary, gender-neutral language. Resources from premodern liturgies, uniting two people of equal social status[215] (because of being the same sex and gender) can highlight the impact of gender stereotypes and gendered roles on contemporary meanings of marriage, as Luke realised when considering marriage for same-sex couples in church: 'How does that then affect the rest of the liturgy that we're doing for heterosexual couples?'[216]

Ceremonies with gender-neutral language can enable mixed-sex couples to perform an equal marriage between them based on their love, embodying mutuality and fidelity, with optional choices for parenting and the nurture of children in a pro/creative union. I have argued that my research shows a convergence of meanings of equal marriage and partnership has already happened in practice and in espoused theologies within the Church of England. This led to my proposal for an alternative gender-neutral option for mixed-sex marriage in church, for couples to perform and enact equal marriage. This can be a step towards a reformed normative theology of equal marriage through praying the liturgy which may evolve over time to an inclusive espoused theology for all couples. In the interim, a transition period of discernment with services with prayer for God's blessing for couples after civil union can enable pastoral and liturgical practice to inform normative theologies in the Church of England, by recovering a theology of blessing for same-sex couples.[217]

[214] Theological reflection on marriage. Portfolio.
[215] Clearly, other social factors also affect equality, including economic status, education, race, dis/ability and other dis/advantage.
[216] See Chapter 2.
[217] The Church of England has not yet published guidelines for services or blessing of mixed-sex civil partnerships as civil law comes into force by or on 31st December 2019.

Towards a theology of equal marriage expressed in liturgy

To conclude this chapter, I signpost towards liturgical renewal for Christian equal marriage with my lightly-revised alternative to the Preface (Archbishops' Council, 2000, p. 105) for contemporary Church of England marriage.[218]

A Revised Preface, for Equal Marriage

In the presence of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit[219]
we have come together to witness the marriage of *N* and *N*
to pray for God's blessing on them
to share their joy
and to celebrate their love.

Marriage is a gift of God in creation
through which the couple[220] may know the grace of God.
It is given that as two people[221] grow together in love and trust
they shall be united with one another in heart, body and mind
as Christ is united with his bride, the Church.

The gift of marriage brings the couple[222] together
in the delight and tenderness of loving intimacy[223]
and joyful commitment to the end of their lives.

It is given as the foundation of family life
in which children are [born and] nurtured
and in which each member of the family,
in good times and in bad,
may find strength, companionship and comfort,
and grow to maturity in love.

Marriage is a way of life made holy by God,
and blessed by the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ
with those celebrating a wedding at Cana in Galilee.

Marriage is a sign of unity and loyalty
which all should uphold and honour.
It enriches society and strengthens community.
No one should enter into it lightly or selfishly
but reverently and responsibly in the sight of almighty God.

[218] Square brackets in the original mark optional words in the current Preface. References note four changes I have made in the text, and a possible established alternative way of addressing God.
[219] Alternative language for God the Holy Trinity includes: 'God: Source of all being, Eternal Word and Holy Spirit.' (The Society of Saint Francis. (1992). *Celebrating Common Prayer. A Version of the Daily Office SSF*. London, UK: Mowbray).
[220] From 'husband and wife.'
[221] From 'man and woman.'
[222] From 'husband and wife.'
[223] From 'sexual union.'

> *N* and *N* are now to enter this way of life.
>
> They will each give their consent to the other and make solemn vows and in token of this they will [each] give and receive a ring.
>
> We pray with them that the Holy Spirit will guide and strengthen them that they may fulfil God's purposes for the whole of their earthly life together.

This alternative version replaces language of cultural stereotypes and labels – and their associated traditional meanings of unequal roles and status – with non-gendered terms. My Revised Preface offers an example of how language revision enables a text to move away from closed binary dichotomies or labelling, to become open to rich meanings that can be inclusive of couples' unique expressions and performances of their marriages. In addition, by widening language to the 'delight and tenderness of loving intimacy' the focus of the meaning of marriage shifts, to reframe the context and celebrate loving whilst still including the possibility of sexual union within a lifelong relationship that can be expressed in myriad ways; as a Christian mutual and faithful pro/creative union, with responsible choices for parenting and the nurture of children.

Conclusion

This research offers the Church of England evidence from sustained practical theological enquiry to reform theology and change policy, to enable contemporary performance of equal marriage (mixed-sex) and to lift the prohibition of blessing of same-sex civil unions. Liturgies proposed in this research will enable clergy practitioners (with an exemption clause of conscience) to welcome all couples for celebration in church of their union of Christian harmony and peace, whether marriage (mixed-sex) or prayer for God's blessing (after civil unions).

In this research into meanings of equal marriage in the Church of England I have argued that participants' unions (mixed-sex and same-sex) converge in their embodiment of mutuality and fidelity, two of the Church's benefits of marriage. I have argued that the contemporary social and legal context in England provides responsible choices for parenting for all couples and, in pastoral practice, that participants would include same-sex couples and their families with prayer for God's blessing. Focusing on the Church's third benefit of marriage asserted as biological complementarity (2012), this research within the Church of England argues that changes in the social and legal contexts in England coupled with changes in academic research on sex, gender and sexuality have resulted in Christian unions and parenting that are not limited to the Church's asserted theory of the biological complementarity of the couple. By recognising that Christian committed relationships among participants embody mutuality and fidelity, expressing two virtues and benefits of marriage in the Church of England, and by reinterpreting the third benefit as optional parenting and the nurture of children in a pro/creative relationship, my research argues that the Church can legitimately reform its theology and change its policy of prohibition of blessing. This reform will enable the Church of England to welcome all couples and families who seek God's blessing through marriage or through a liturgy of prayer and blessing in church.

Proposed reforms

This research proposes a transition period of sustained theological reflection through practical theology where lived practice and, in particular, prayed and performed liturgies inform and reform the Church's normative theology including renewal of liturgy and practice. I propose two revisions to the Church of England's marriage liturgy (Archbishops' Council 2000, pp. 102-131), and one reform of theology to enable a policy change with a

new liturgy for blessing after civil unions, so that the Church can discern together through *lex orandi, lex credendi*, in liturgy and worship.

An example of revised language for the first two reforms is above (page 164).

Firstly, light revision of the Church's contemporary marriage liturgy to enable couples (mixed-sex) to marry each other in the Church of England in a ceremony of equal marriage. This proposed alternative option can offer gender-neutral language, with rubrics enabling a full expression and celebration of the couple's equality, without changing the Church's normative theology (within Canon B30).

Secondly, light revision of the Church of England's Preface for marriage (mixed-sex) to provide an option to nuance emphasis from a particular focus on sexual union, based on biological complementarity with the possibility of procreation. This alternative will recognise the social and biological reality for couples of wider meanings and practices of embodied intimacy and parenting. This reform also offers the possibility that a theology of pro/creative relationship is wider than biological procreation.

Thirdly a reform of the Church's normative theology, to recognise that Christian loving, committed unions (marriage and civil unions) embody two virtues and benefits of marriage – mutuality and fidelity – in a pro/creative relationship. 'Platonic' marriage is already recognised in English law,[224] and the qualities of mutuality and fidelity were also affirmed in premodern brother-making rituals of two men.[225] This recognition of *Christian unions of harmony and peace* within normative theology can lead to a change in the Church of England's policy. A liturgy to celebrate in Church after civil unions can recover and renew practice from premodern liturgies of blessing for unions of two men. A liturgy of prayer open to all couples will enable Church of England clergy and churches to provide an inclusive, affirming welcome to celebrate with their families and community and to pray together for God's blessing. A 'conscience clause' for clergy, following the pattern for marriage in church after divorce, can be part of this reform. During a transition period, or as an alternative or addition to a separate liturgy, the premodern practice of sharing Holy Communion in church after forming kinship and friendship bonds (including brotherhood) can be renewed to revitalise contemporary normative theology.

[224] See above, pp. 99, 162.
[225] See above, pp. 25, 152.

A Christian theology of unions of harmony and peace recovered in this research embraces contemporary marriage and civil partnership as unions within a network of Christian kinship and friendship bonds. This theology, arising from practice through sustained formal research, mandates the Church of England to lift the prohibition on blessing of same-sex civil partnerships in church, discerned as Christian kinship and friendship bonds. A theology of blessing for couples after contracting civil marriage (or partnership) – whose relationships embody mutuality and fidelity, with optional parenting and the nurture of children in a pro/creative relationship – can be developed further through recognition of Christian kinship and friendship bonds. Marriage for mixed-sex couples in church can, I argue, be discerned as a Christian union of harmony and peace, shown in this research to be converging in rich meanings through rituals and liturgy with other forms of Christian kinship and friendship bond, to embody mutuality and fidelity with optional parenting and the nurture of children in a diversity of 'very joyful and glorious'[226] pro/creative relationships.

Impact on practice

The performance of Christian equal marriage by mixed-sex couples will be enabled through a liturgy offering optional alternative gender-neutral language and rubrics, and a further option to broaden the meaning of embodied union to loving intimacy rather than narrowly to define marriage by sexual union. The Church will be able to discern through prayer, symbol and ritual the crossing of narrative tracks in sacred liturgy (Crites, 1971), in the customary space of the Christian community gathered in worship (Bray, 2003). In parallel, the recovery of blessing for unions of Christian harmony and peace from premodern liturgies (particularly in the context of, or followed by, Holy Communion (Bray, 2003)) can both renew meanings of Christian marriage in the Church of England (mixed-sex) and enable couples to celebrate with blessing after civil unions, both mixed- and same-sex. Clergy in the Church of England will be able to offer a pastoral welcome with prayer for God's blessing to all couples, in the name of Christ. Couples, their families and guests will be included – and experience God's loving hospitality – within the family of the Christian Church, welcome to explore kinship and friendship further, in baptism and Eucharist.

[226] Pete, see above, page 159.

Further research

Liturgies of Christian harmony and peace proposed by this research for marriage and for blessing after civil unions can, through practice and reflection, inform further theological enquiry. The fusion of horizons in liturgical practice, from the premodern era resonating with contemporary practice through participants' theologies in this research, can be researched following a trial period of the proposed revised liturgies. Additional research can test and build on the argument in this project, that unions of marriage and civil partnership in the Church of England are relationships embodying two virtues and benefits of marriage, mutuality and fidelity, with the third benefit reinterpreted as responsible choices for parenting and the nurture of children, in a pro/creative relationship. Future research can discern whether this convergence in practice and theology leads to marriage within the Church of England for same-sex couples, or retains a parallel liturgy to celebrate same-sex (and mixed-sex) civil unions with a service of prayer and blessing in church.

Three participants whose relationships were in transition[227] offered detailed narratives in a complex matrix of sex, gender, sexuality, marriage, partnership and parenting within the contemporary context of social and legal changes. Future research to focus in depth on the rich, thick description of these three narratives, and to extend the sample, could interpret meanings of equal marriage and partnership from couples with an intersex or trans partner or spouse, through this research methodology.

Research within the Church of England could continue with participants who have married since civil law included same-sex couples (2014) during planning for my fieldwork. When civil partnership is equalised (2020), research with mixed-sex civil partners could continue to discern whether marriage and civil partnership are converging on mutuality and fidelity in an equal pro/creative relationship, with choices for parenting and the nurture of children, or are two distinctive relationships within society and in the Church.

Further research and sustained theological reflection could test the Church of England's doctrine (Canon B30) on marriage 'for the procreation and nurture of children,' with the possibility from this research that 'pro/creation' of children is no longer defined by, or limited to, sexual intercourse by the two parents. Given the changes in the legal and social contexts of the 21st century surveyed in this research, that parenting is in practice wider than biological procreation in marriage, this research raises the possibility that the priority

[227] I have not quoted from two of the co-constructed narratives in this research due to their complexity and the need to assure confidentiality.

of the Church's traditional understanding could be interpreted anew to focus on '*the blessing, and nurture of children*,' however they arrived in the family. This could resonate with a renewal of a theology of kinship bonds within the Church founded on adoption into God's family the Church through Christ, and offer a way to embrace and include different families where 'the pro/creation and nurture of children' is celebrated and affirmed.

Further theological reflection on human being 'made in the image and likeness' of God can reveal 'hidden normativity within these practices' (Ganzevoort) to illuminate and reinterpret the Church's doctrines (Beattie). Theological reflection and research on the first biblical creation narrative can consider the *inclusive* language used in the text, that humankind was created 'in the image of God' 'male *and* female'[228] (Genesis 1.27, NRSV). The data analysis method in this research of Versus Coding, that reveals mutually exclusive moieties,[229] can critique further the Churches' theories of *binary* gender complementarity that imply humankind is essentially 'male *or* female.'

Further research on Christian relationships of harmony and peace – marriage, partnership, kinship bonds within the scriptures and Church – may contribute significant 'unheard' poetics of testimony (Walton), 'luminous moments' where divine and human stories cross through performed religious rituals and symbols in 'double intersection' (Crites). Theological reflection in the community of faith (Lindbeck) may, through building on this research, further glimpse God the Holy Trinity's 'pro/creativity' present and 'speaking through' creation, incarnation, redemption, and communion, fulfilled in reunion of, and with, divine love. Further prayerful reflection and research may, in turn, perceive, hear and sense godly 'pro/creativity' in human committed relationships and in parenting, as people come to the Church in thanksgiving, to pray for God's blessing.

Review of research methodology

These proposed reforms signpost towards an emerging normative theology of equal marriage and union within the Church of England. Through recognition of faithful and varied ways of embodying and living in Christian loving, committed unions of harmony and peace, I have argued that marriage and civil partnership are forms of Christian, committed, pro/creative, vowed (or sworn) friendship, often including parenting and the nurture of children. Expressed in operant and espoused theologies from reflexive Christian research

[228] The same inclusive language for gender used by Paul: 'There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male *and* female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus' (Galatians 3.28, NRSV, emphasis added).
[229] See above, pp. 59-61. (Saldaña, 2013).

participants (three quarters of whom were clergy practitioners in the Church of England), my formal research methodology has woven their unique voices into a co-constructed subaltern voice of theology. This plural, nuanced, formal voice of theology (Cameron, et al.) offers evidence for reform of the Church's normative theology towards Christian equal marriage and partnership, with prayer for God's blessing. The concept of four voices of theology in this research enabled me to interpret and weave two nuanced, patterned strands from Christian theologies of equal marriage and partnership, both patterns with responsible choices for parenting and the nurture of children. The concept itself was fractured and transformed through this formal research by the recognition and interpretation of multiple, co-existent Christian patterns of living in committed unions, with richly-varied operant and espoused voices of theologies for equal marriage and partnership, that expand, enrich and challenge the Church of England's normative theology from within the Church.

Summary

This research contributes new knowledge through theologies of marriage and partnership of two people within the Church of England, leading to proposed changes in the Church's contemporary practice. A methodology of practical theology with narrative approaches fostered this qualitative research through an extended, sustained interpretation between participants' narratives, academic literature in three theoretical frameworks, evidence of sworn friendship blessed in church from premodern liturgies and rituals, and my contemporary reflexive, liturgical and pastoral practice. I conclude that evidence of emerging inclusive theologies of marriage, partnership and parenting can enable and mandate the Church of England to reform its policy and lift the prohibition of blessing of same-sex couples in church after civil unions. I have argued that the Church of England can achieve this reform by authorizing revisions, to liturgies for equal marriage (mixed-sex) and for prayer with blessing in church for couples after civil unions. The formal, co-constructed subaltern voice expressed through this research emphasises that there is an urgent pastoral, missional priority for the Church of England to enable practitioners to minister a Christian loving welcome for all couples, through marriage or prayers for God's blessing in church after civil unions. Church of England liturgies for equal marriage and for blessing after civil union will empower a couple to express their loving commitment as equals beloved by God, united in rituals and symbols handed down through scripture and tradition from the premodern era, of Christian harmony and peace, reinterpreted for today, resonating anew with God's creating, transforming presence and empowering love.

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Appendix 1

Participant Information Sheet

You are being invited to consider taking part in a research project that is investigating changes in understandings of marriage and committed relationships in the Church of England. In particular, the project seeks to explore whether there are examples of equal relationships within the Church of England, in marriage or civil partnership, which might help investigate how we think of marriage in future years. The timing of the research coincides with changes in marriage law in England, admitting people to civil marriage regardless of their gender and sexuality. The study is being conducted by Gill Henwood, a parish priest in the Church of England since 1997 and a former member of General Synod (the Church's parliament), who is researching in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies of the University of Chester.

To be able to think about whether you would like to participate in this research, this information sheet gives details of why it is being done and what will be involved. Please take time to read the information carefully and you are most welcome to discuss it with others to help you consider. If you have any questions or would like clarification, please contact Gill Henwood, who will be pleased to explain further and to provide more information you may need. Before deciding whether to take part, please take your time, as it is entirely your decision.

Thank you for reading this.

What is the purpose of the study?

The study's purpose is to explore how some people in the Church of England who have been in committed relationships, including marriage and civil partnership, for ten years or more:

a. experience equality within their relationship, what that means to them and how it is demonstrated,

and

b. think about who should be able to marry and/or have a service of blessing in the Church of England.

The study asks what equality means to men and women within committed relationships within the Church of England and seeks to discover many ways of thinking and experiencing equality in human relationship. It will ask how these different experiences might influence the Church of England's teaching on marriage and services for couples who wish to marry or have a service of blessing.

This project will contribute to the debate in the Church of England on marriage and services of blessing held in church and will offer Anglican Christian contributions to the national debate on the meanings of marriage.

Why have I been asked to take part in this study?

You have been asked to participate in this research because:

i) You have been identified as being a Church of England Christian;

and

ii) You may consider that your relationship is based on, or aspires to, a sense of equality.

iii) You are in a committed relationship and have been together for at least ten years, for example (but not exclusively):

You are married,

or

You are in a civil partnership, and have been together for at least ten years (given that civil partnerships have only been available since 2005),

or

You are recently married but have been together for at least ten years (given that civil marriage is only available for new same sex couples from 29th March 2014 and for civil partners from 10th December 2014);

or

You have been together for at least ten years (partners or civil partners) and wish to marry in Church if and when it becomes possible (given that marriage in the Church of England is currently for one man and one woman and the House of Bishops guidance restricts clergy).

or

You have been together for at least ten years but have not partnered or married yet because you have reservations about traditional marriage and/or about the Church of England's teaching or guidelines for people in ministry.

Your occupation, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, class or any other aspect of your identity does not matter. The study seeks to interview Anglican Christians from a range of backgrounds and from different committed relationships.

Do I have to take part?

It is your choice whether to take part in this study. If you decide to take part, you will be free to withdraw at any time and there will be no need to give a reason. To take part, you will be invited to sign a form giving your consent. The study will be through one-to-one interview conversations with the opportunity for interaction and reflection. There is no obligation to answer any questions where you feel uncomfortable and you remain free at all times to pause or end the interview. If you have any questions or concerns about taking part, please do contact Gill Henwood.

What will happen if I take part?

You will be given a form to sign to give your consent, if you decide to take part. This information sheet will be given to you to keep for future reference. Once your consent has been given, Gill Henwood, who is researching in the Department of Theology and

Religious Studies in the University of Chester, will contact you to make arrangements for an interview in a location and at a time and date to suit you.

At the interview, which will last for around 90 minutes to two hours, you will be invited to talk about your experience of being in a committed relationship where you have a sense of equality with your spouse or partner. You will be asked how your relationship relates to your experience of being in the Church of England and how you view other people who seek to have a service of marriage or blessing in the Church. The interview will take a path guided both by the interviewer and your own experiences and views. So that you are able to ensure accuracy, the interviewer will record the interview and type up a transcript for you to check and amend. If you are happy to do so, it will be helpful to arrange a second interview with you to follow up themes or ideas as the study progresses. You do not have to agree to this at this stage and you are free to withdraw from the project at any time.

What are the possible risks or disadvantages of taking part?
As this study will be conducted with confidentiality, protecting your identity and with your consent, I have not identified any risks or disadvantages to you taking part.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?
You may find that the interview is a welcome opportunity to share your experience of equality within your relationship and your experience within the Church of England in a confidential, safe context of listening and reflection. By taking part in this study, your experience will help research to understand how different people reflect equality in their relationships and to influence thinking in the Church of England on marriage and blessings.

What if something goes wrong?
If you wish to complain or have any concerns about any aspect of the way you have been approached or treated during the course of this study, please contact:

Professor Robert E Warner
Executive Dean of Humanities
University of Chester
Parkgate Road
Chester
CH1 4BJ
r.warner@chester.ac.uk

Will my interview and what I say be anonymised, and is what I share confidential?
At the interview, Gill will discuss with you how you would like information about yourself and anyone you mention to be written down in the transcript and any reports. You can choose to be completely anonymous or to keep some information anonymous or altered, such as your name, age, occupation and other names you use. If Gill needs assistance to type up the interviews, she will ask you in advance whether you will consent to one employed research assistant typing from the recorded interview. The choice is entirely yours.

The transcript, anonymised in the way agreed with you, will be read by you and by Gill (apart from possible typing assistance as above). When the research is complete, extracts from the transcript (duly anonymised) will be used in the research findings and presented at conferences.

Who is researching and funding this project?
The project is funded by Gill Henwood as an independent study she will carry out, as part of her research for a Professional Doctorate in the University of Chester's Department of Theology and Religious Studies.

Who can I contact for further information?
If you would like more information about the research before you decide whether or not you would like to take part, please do not hesitate to contact:

The Revd Gill Henwood, Keen Ground, Hawkshead, Ambleside, LA22 0NW
07712 526719
gillkhenwood@hotmail.com

Thank you very much for your interest in this research.

Appendix 2

Title of Project:
What does equal marriage mean within the Church of England?

Name of Researcher:

Gill Henwood
Keen Ground
Hawkshead
Ambleside
LA22 0NW

07712 526719
gillkhenwood@hotmail.com

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the participant information sheet, dated ……., for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions. ☐

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason and without my care or legal rights being affected. ☐

3. I agree to take part in the above study. ☐

Name of Participant:

Date:

Signature:

Gill Henwood

Date:

Signature: